

# THE UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

*An Enumeration and Analysis*

BY WILLIAM ANDERSON

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

1949 revision



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## PREFACE TO THE 1942 EDITION

THE DATA for the first edition of this pamphlet were gathered between 1930 and 1933, and the calculations of average populations and areas of local units then made were based upon the Fifteenth or 1930 Census of Population. In the nearly 10 years that have elapsed since the original enumerations of local units were made, many changes have occurred and the Sixteenth or 1940 Census of Population has been published. These facts, coupled with the exhaustion of the first edition and a continued demand for up-to-date information about units of government, seem to warrant the publication of a second and revised edition.

The research for the first edition was financed in part by grants from the Social Science Research Council and the graduate school research fund of the University of Minnesota. The latter fund has also supplied indispensable financial support for the revision that is published herewith. Miss MYRTLE EKLUND, Mr. A. N. CHRISTENSEN, and Dr. ROGER V. SHUMATE were of great assistance in the preparation of the data for the first edition. Mr. HERBERT McCLOSKEY, Assistant in the Department of Political Science, University of Minnesota, and Mrs. JOE O. EMBRY, of the staff of the Committee on Public Administration of the Social Science Research Council, have borne the heaviest load in preparing this revision. Both are entitled to my sincere thanks for their intelligent and painstaking efforts.

But this edition, even more than the first, is the result of truly cooperative research. In all but one state I have had the benefit of the efforts of at least one collaborator who studied the units of government in his own state and supplied me with invaluable information concerning them. While this does not mean that an absolutely perfect enumeration of units has been made, it does signify that this edition is a little closer to the truth about many states than the first one could possibly be. To maintain uniformity of treatment as nearly as that is possible, I have made my own decisions finally as to what entities should count as "units of government" in each state. For that reason my collaborators are absolved from responsibility for figures published herein. This absolution in no way diminishes my indebtedness to them, and in token of my thanks I publish their names herewith.

WILLIAM ANDERSON

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# The Units of Government in the United States

## *An Enumeration and Analysis*

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IT is the purpose of this study to answer as accurately as possible the following questions:

1. How many distinct units of government are in operation in the United States?
2. What are the principal classes and characteristics of these governmental units?
3. What are their dimensions in such matters as area and population served, in so far as these are known?
4. What are the trends with respect to increases and decreases in the number of local units?
5. Are there on the whole too few or too many units of government now in operation? This question involves a consideration of the adequacy of governmental units for the functions they have to perform.

To the extent that these questions can be answered, this publication will contribute to a knowledge of the structure of government, and especially of local government, in the United States.

### Part I. 1930-1940: A Decade of Changes

THE FIRST attempt to make the enumeration of governmental units set forth in this book was begun in 1930 and finished in 1933. It proved to be no easy task and the results were not all that had been hoped for. In no state has the legislature provided for an adequate, permanent, and continuous registration of information about the organization of local governments. There is no state officer anywhere who has the responsibility and the facilities for getting, and keeping up to date, information on this subject. Neither has the national government imposed the duty of collecting this information upon any of its agencies.

As a result, officially published information dealing with local governments is meager, unsystematic, and marred by numerous errors. State tax departments know a good deal about the local units that currently levy property taxes, and departments of education are generally familiar

with the school districts in their states; but other state agencies as a rule know little about the numbers, population, and resources of the local governments within the state. In all states the information is particularly deficient with respect to the numerous types of special districts that do not levy direct property taxes. Another great gap in the information is related to the dissolution and discontinuance of units. The fact that a particular local unit does not levy a tax for a certain year does not mean that it has ceased to exist or even ceased to operate, although it may disappear that year from the official lists of taxing units. On the other hand formal dissolutions do take place from time to time, without being centrally reported or recorded. More common are the cases of units that discontinue operations because of indifference, decline of population, completion of their work, or some other cause. Such *de facto* cessations of operations are not recorded anywhere,

and the laws in most states are very uncertain as to when such nonoperating units are to be considered legally discontinued. All these factors contribute to the margin of error that is unavoidable in any attempt to determine how many units of government are legally existent and in operation at any time.

#### MAJOR CHANGES IN THE DECADE

Since the figures for the first enumeration were gathered over several years, from 1930 to 1933, a precise date for that enumeration cannot be given. For the present revision, January 1, 1941, was taken as the date of enumeration, and most of the figures given are as of that date or very near it. The total figures for the two enumerations are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF THE NUMBER OF UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1930-33 AND IN 1941

	1930-33	1941
The nation .....	1	1
The states .....	48	48
Counties (in 46 states) and parishes (in 1 state) .....	3,053	3,050
Incorporated places (cities, villages, etc., and the District of Columbia) ..	16,366	16,262
Towns (as in New England) and or- ganized townships (in a total of 23 states) .....	20,262	18,998
School districts .....	127,108	118,308
Other units .....	8,580	8,382
TOTAL .....	175,418	165,049

In 1941, therefore, there were 10,369 fewer units of local government than 10 years earlier. This number is distributed among the various types of units as follows:

Type of Unit	Actual Decrease	Per Cent of Decrease
School districts .....	8,800	6.9
Towns and townships .....	1,264	6.2
Special districts other than school....	198	2.3
Incorporated places .....	104	0.6
Counties .....	3	0.1
TOTAL .....	10,369	5.9

How can these decreases in every category of local units be explained? A part of the explanation lies in the greater care with which the present enumeration was made and the far better information obtained from the states through collaborators who knew the state situation. A special effort was made in all states to eliminate those local units that were known to be inactive to such an extent as to permit the presumption that they had been discontinued or dissolved. For example the reduction in the num-

ber of incorporated places can be explained largely in this way. A special inquiry was made to determine whether incorporated places of less than 100 inhabitants, listed in the 1940 census, were actually carrying on local governments. The elimination of many nonoperating units that were probably included in the earlier enumeration no doubt more than made up for the addition of places incorporated during the decade. With declines in population, however, many small incorporated places have undoubtedly given up their corporate existence so that an actual net decline in the number of such places may have taken place during the thirties.

In percentage as well as in numerical decrease school districts (6.9 per cent decrease) and towns and townships (6.2 per cent decrease) are far in the lead. Among school districts it is primarily the small rural districts that are being eliminated, mainly through consolidation. Some districts maintain a nominal existence and levy an annual tax to finance sending the children to a neighboring district school. In any case, the decrease in numbers of local government units is mainly a decrease in rural townships, rural school districts, and other special rural districts, so that the phenomenon of decrease is directly associated with the decline in population in the more thinly settled rural areas. Low agricultural incomes, drouth, and the decline in the size and numbers of rural families have all contributed to the decrease, but these factors of themselves do not explain the changes.

Special districts other than school districts frequently cease to function simply because their work is done. The ditch has been dug or the road built, and the debt has been paid off. Maintenance thereafter may be the work of the county, or it may even be abandoned. At any rate the original district organization no longer has work to do, it ceases to operate, and eventually ceases to exist.

At the same time the local units that disappear do not all simply drift into oblivion as a result of losing population. In many if not in most cases acts of deliberation and choice cause them to disappear,—legislative acts that authorize or require dissolution or consolidation under certain conditions, and local acts of decision in conformity with the legislation. The practical elimination of township organizations in Oklahoma and the abolition of the poor districts in Pennsylvania are examples of general acts of legislation that required no local decisions. The consolidation of school districts in many states, the abolition of townships in certain Minnesota counties, and the

elimination of numerous special districts in New York represent situations in which some degree of choice was left to the localities concerned.

#### CHANGES IN STATE TOTALS

Lumping the figures for all units into state totals we find that 32 states showed decreases in numbers while 16 showed increases. Again it should be mentioned that, in part, the increases and decreases are merely statistical rather than actual; better information has been available and has made possible a better handling of the data. To some extent these statistical changes actually cancel each other. Thus the largest state increases, Georgia (1,246) and Indiana (1,202) may be accounted for by more accurate information, and the same is true of one of the largest decreases, namely Illinois (1,707). On the other hand the largest single decrease, New York (2,855) is more than accounted for by the actual reduction (3,071) in the number of school districts in that state. Similarly most of the decreases by states seem to reflect actual diminutions in numbers. With this much explanation it is interesting to rank the state increases and decreases in numbers of units for the decade (Figure 1).

As indicated, some of these increases and decreases represent real changes, whereas others are due to better information. Although it will involve some repetition, the major changes may next be considered by types of units.

#### DECREASES IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The fact that economic depression, drouth, and population declines do not alone explain decreases in local governmental units is revealed by the school district figures. In this category there is a net decrease of 8,800 units, or 6.9 per cent. This figure is the composite result of both increases and decreases. A reconsideration of the nature and status of 1,250 school districts in Georgia, 160 in Tennessee, and 989 township school districts in Indiana has led to their inclusion as separate units of government in this 1941 enumeration. In addition, there were small net increases in North Dakota (85), Colorado (17), Florida (22), New Jersey (7), and Vermont (1), to make the total additions and increases in these states 2,531.

The largest decreases were in New York (3,071), North Carolina (1,207), Texas (992), California (829), Michigan (602), Montana (562), Missouri (559), Mississippi (432), and Ohio (422). There were substantial decreases in other states as well, but in the tier of states from

North Dakota south through Oklahoma, which suffered so heavily from drouth and depression in the thirties and which showed the most substantial decreases in population during the decade, school districts actually increased in number in North Dakota, and decreased in the five states combined only from 26,492 to 26,187, a decrease of only 305, or just over 1 per cent. Public education in these states suffered serious financial reverses, but the thousands of school districts did not give up. In New York and other states where substantial decreases occurred, education suffered much less but positive programs of consolidation and centralization substantially reduced the numbers of school districts.

#### DECREASES IN TOWNSHIPS

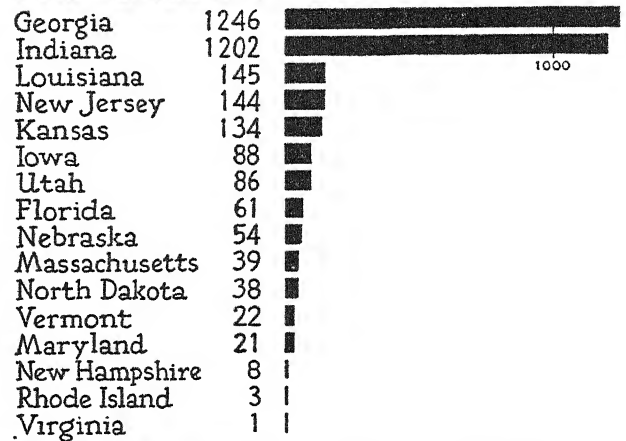
The data on decreases in townships call for a slightly different interpretation. Depression difficulties in road-financing through property taxes explain in part the abolition of the taxing power of Oklahoma townships and the consequent demise of this whole category of local units in that state. The elimination of all 969 organized townships in that state accounts for more than three-fourths of the total reduction in townships in all states. Of the net decrease of 295 in all other states having towns and organized townships, Minnesota accounted for 90, North Dakota 65, South Dakota 53, Illinois 45, Nebraska 29, and Maine 18. The net reduction of units in this category in the 22 states still having them was, therefore, only from 19,293 to 18,998, or 1.5 per cent. Three states showed small increases: Iowa 7, Ohio 4, and Pennsylvania 3. Kansas stood unchanged at 1,550, Missouri at 345, Wisconsin at 1,289, Indiana at 1,016, and New York at 932. There is certainly little evidence of a movement of avalanche proportions to wipe out the township system.

#### CHANGED NUMBERS OF INCORPORATED PLACES

As previously suggested, the evidence on incorporated places is somewhat ambiguous. Certainly there were a number of new incorporations during the decade although at a much reduced rate. At the same time many small isolated villages and "incorporated towns" lost in population and ceased to function as governments without in all cases going through the legal formality of dissolving. In this survey, as distinct from the earlier one, a special inquiry was made into the active political existence of small incorporated places. Many were shown by the 1940 census to have fewer than 100 inhabitants. As a result of a special inquiry made this time, many places were elimi-

# Total INCREASES and DECREASES in All Local Units, - by States, from 1930-33 to 1941

## INCREASES - 16 States - 3,292



## DECREASES - 32 States - 13,661



Figure 1

nated from the list of operating governmental units, but, since some of these probably had become inactive much earlier and should not have been counted even in the 1930-33 enumeration, the data presented here cannot be used to prove an actual decline to the extent given in the numbers of incorporated places during the past decade. It is more likely that new incorporations just about equaled dissolutions and other cases of abandonment of political organization in places once incorporated.

Whatever the explanation, the data show a decrease in incorporated places for the whole of the United States from 16,366 to 16,262. This decrease of 104 is less than 1 per cent. There were decreases totaling 412 in 18 states, and increases totaling 308 in 22 states; 8 states had unchanged totals. The increases and decreases were very unequally distributed throughout the country.

The greatest net decreases in numbers of incorporated places are shown in the 10 southeastern states of Georgia (134), Kentucky (88), Mississippi (42), Tennessee (29), Alabama (28), Louisiana (18), North Carolina (17), South Carolina (17), Florida (8), and Virginia (7). It will be noted that this phenomenon is almost entirely confined to the southeast, and the total decrease in that area is 388. Eight other scattered states also showed minor decreases, the largest being in Oregon (9).

The two largest increases were in Texas (74) and Utah (56). On the other hand the most consistent increases are found in a group of mid-western states from Ohio to Kansas, including Minnesota (23), Ohio (22), Missouri (20), Iowa (16), Indiana (13), Wisconsin (11), Illinois (10), Kansas (8) and Michigan (4). New York had an increase of 16, New Mexico 7, California 6, and Colorado 4. The total of net increases in 22 states was 308.

#### COUNTIES ALMOST UNCHANGED

The first edition of this study enumerated 3,053 counties that were considered to be separate and independent units of government. There were 46 other "county areas" in which county functions were performed, but for various reasons these were not considered separate units. This time the tabulation shows 3,050 counties that are units of government, or a net decrease of only 3. The decreases are from 161 to 159 in Georgia, and from 64 to 63 in Louisiana. Other states show no change. The reductions in Georgia are the result of actual consolidations, while the change in the Louisiana figure results from a decision that

New Orleans Parish has in fact been so absorbed into the government of the City of New Orleans as to have ceased to be a separate unit of government.

Thus it appears that the pattern of county areas throughout the country is rather firmly fixed, and that all the recent talk of consolidating counties and reducing their numbers has resulted in very little action up to now.

#### CHANGES IN SPECIAL DISTRICTS OTHER THAN FOR SCHOOL PURPOSES

Hardest of all to deal with are the special districts other than school districts. This difficulty can be explained partly as follows. (1) No state agency is responsible for compiling and reporting the information concerning them, nor need they in most cases record with any state or county authority the fact of their organization. (2) As a rule they do not levy direct property taxes; in consequence, the state and county tax authorities are practically unaware of their existence. (3) New classes of such units are easily and frequently authorized by state legislation without much public notice. It would be necessary to read all the new legislation of every state each year in order to get on the trail of all these new units. (4) Under such laws local units are rather easily organized and as easily suspended or dissolved, and the facts are not noted anywhere. (5) Many such local units are distinctly borderline cases. Whether they are to be classed as separate units of government or not is often a disputable question.

The figures for 1941 show a net decrease of 198 in this category of governmental units—a reduction from 8,580 to 8,382, or 2.3 per cent. This decrease can be better understood if analyzed both by states and by subordinate categories. There have been both increases and decreases in substantial amounts, so that the total net change in no sense reveals a general nation-wide trend. Some of the changes reported may be accounted for by better information obtained this time, and would therefore not reflect actual changes in numbers.

In Table 2 the net changes by classes for the entire country are shown. It should be noted that the great decrease in rural road and bridge districts (2,114) amounts to nearly one-fourth of all special districts (other than school) in all categories in 1930-33, but that it is nearly balanced by the sum of the increases in four of the old categories and in the two new ones. More closely examined this decrease in rural road and bridge



districts is found to be centered almost entirely in three states: Illinois (1,419), Arkansas (459), and Missouri (104). Considered thus by categories on a nation-wide basis, the decrease of 1,982 in road and bridge districts alone in these three contiguous states exceeds the total increase (1,974) in all other types of special districts here being considered.

for aid to local units in their respective ventures, have been mainly responsible for propagating these new species of local units. Thus the national government's first important venture into the local government arena has resulted in increasing the numbers of local units and in further complicating the structure of local government. At the same time, state enabling acts were needed

TABLE 2. SPECIAL DISTRICTS (OTHER THAN SCHOOL): NUMERICAL INCREASES AND DECREASES BY TYPES

	1930-33	1941	Increase	Decrease
Water Control .....	2,724	2,911	187	—
Irrigation and Conservation.....	627	712	85	—
Rural Road and Bridge.....	3,802	1,688	—	2,114
Urban Improvement .....	285	227	—	58
Urban Utility .....	460	702	242	—
Miscellaneous <sup>a</sup> .....	682	1,510	828	—
Housing Authorities (new) .....	—	525	525	—
Soil Conservation Districts (new)...	—	107	107	—
TOTAL .....	8,580	8,382	1,974	2,172
				1,974
NET DECREASE .....				198

<sup>a</sup> Includes 373 poor districts in Pennsylvania.

All other types of special districts in this table show substantial increases except urban improvement districts which exhibit a 20 per cent decline. The increase is very striking in the case of "miscellaneous" districts (828, or from 682 to 1,510), and this is in spite of the fact that 373 poor districts in Pennsylvania, previously classified in this category, were abolished before the present enumeration.

#### NEW TYPES OF AUTHORITIES

Included with the increases are the figures for two new types of units: public housing authorities, and soil conservation districts. Had not these been added to the total enumeration the decrease in special districts for the country as a whole would have been over 800, or about 10 per cent. These two classes of units represent something entirely new in American local government, namely, units of local government that have been created at the direct solicitation of the national government. The United States Housing Authority and the Soil Conservation Service in the United States Department of Agriculture, backed by substantial appropriations made by Congress

before the new entities could be created, and these show some variations from state to state. In some states the legal nature and powers of these entities are such that they cannot be called separate units of government.

When increases and decreases in special districts (other than school) are examined by states rather than by categories, 35 states show net increases amounting in total to 2,763, while only 11 states show net decreases, but these total 2,961. Five states stand out as having the greatest reductions: Illinois (1,615), Arkansas (598), Pennsylvania (352), Tennessee (199), and Missouri (95). In Illinois the reduction is more apparent than real. Other state reductions ranged from 1 to 40.

On the increase side California led with 598, but 11 other states also showed increases of at least 100 each: Georgia 132, Indiana 200, Kansas 248, Louisiana 166, Montana, 100, Nebraska 114, New Jersey 136, New York 200, Ohio 125, Oregon 100, and Wisconsin 137. If there is any trend observable, it is one toward increase rather than decrease; for this development the creation of the new housing authorities and soil conservation districts is partly responsible.



## Part II. The Units of American Government, 1941

IN THIS part an effort will be made to define the concept of a unit of government, to classify those that exist in the United States, and to characterize them with respect to the areas and populations they serve and their adequacy in other respects.

### WHAT IS A UNIT OF GOVERNMENT?

Basic to the research for the first issue of this study was a careful analysis of the laws of all states dealing with the organization of local governments. This work was not repeated *in toto* for this revision, but many laws recently enacted were scanned. Once the laws had been digested it was necessary to make a decision as to whether particular entities authorized by law could be described as distinct units of government. The effort to make these decisions necessitated the preparation of a definition. What is a unit of government? The difficulty encountered at this point was a very real one. In local government especially there are many types of districts, areas, and organizations; they possess a variety of powers and functions; and they are limited and interconnected in an inexplicable diversity of ways. It follows that a short, precise definition that will unfailingly distinguish between units and non-units simply cannot be devised. There is an extensive borderland between those entities that are clearly self-operating units of government and those that as plainly are not. In this shadowy no-man's land are thousands of districts, agencies, and authorities that can be placed on one side or the other of a given line only after careful study, and even then there is risk of error.

The concept of a "unit of government" has nowhere been legally or officially defined. Court decisions, statutes, and legal treatises dealing with local government have used a great variety of terms: municipality, municipal corporation, public corporation, quasi corporation, taxing district, civil division, political subdivision, and others. Many distinctions have been attempted where no real differences existed, such as the suggested distinction between a "taxing district" and a "political subdivision of the state" in the reports, stat-

utes and decisions on the national "municipal bankruptcy act."<sup>1</sup>

The absence of any clear-cut and accepted definition of a unit of *local* government makes it even more difficult to define precisely the generic term "unit of government" which is to cover national and state as well as local entities. At the same time it is the duty of students in every field of investigation to define and classify their materials with ever-increasing accuracy. Students of local government in particular need to know with some definiteness the range and the character of the units with which they are dealing. Consequently a clear definition must be attempted even though it is recognized that the discoverable criteria will not reveal black and white differences but only various shadings of gray. Marginal differences will in some cases be very small.

The processes of government and the exercise of public authority are phenomena commonly observed nearly everywhere and in all ages. Observation reveals men working at public tasks in groups or clusters of groups. They seem to center around certain points like national and state capitals and county seats. From these central groups the operations extend outward even to far distant points where many public officers and agents perform their functions singlehanded. Back of each group or cluster of authorities the observer sees a territory, a people, an entity, vague or definite, that seems to will and to order what these public agents shall do. Different groups even in the same area often reveal conflicting wills and purposes. In these commonly observed phenomena lies the notion of a unit of government, a notion that only needs sharper definition to become a useful tool.

### ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Since a short one-sentence definition without explanation seemed to be insufficient for the purposes of accurate identification, the various

<sup>1</sup> See *Ashton v. Cameron County Water Improvement District No. 1* (1936) 298 U. S. 513, 56 S. Ct. 892, and *United States v. Bekins* (1938) 304 U. S. 27, 58 S. Ct. 811, and materials there cited.

elements necessary to a unit of government have been listed and amplified below. Each element must be present in some degree in any entity that is to qualify as a distinct unit of government. Since the unity and the separate identity of the nation as a governmental unit, and of each of the states, is so generally recognized, the following discussion refers mostly to local governments.

1. *Territory.* Each unit of government as herein defined operates over a definite land or land-and-water area which is in most cases set forth in its constitution, charter, or documents of organization. It may have incidental powers and possessions beyond these territorial limits, yet it remains identified with a particular area. In this respect it is unlike a business corporation or a "government-owned corporation," which usually has a principal place or center of business such as a central office, but ranges outward from that center without very fixed territorial limits.

Because each unit of government has a definite area and powers of government therein, as noted below, it has authority over all persons within its territory with certain known exceptions. In short it is not a thing of voluntary membership like a cooperative society, but a thing of compulsory authority within the limits of its powers over all things and persons within its area.

2. *Population.* Since a unit of government is a human institution, it requires a population, and without population there is no unit of government. How large the minimum population need be it is impossible to say. According to the laws of certain states, townships may become organized units of government with as few as 25 inhabitants, and common school districts may be organized where there are 12 or more children of school age. In either case this amounts to only a few families. Once organized most units may legally continue to operate even if the population later falls below the minimum required for original organization. Especially where there is taxable property in the unit belonging to nonresidents, a very few inhabitants may carry on the government of the place, filling the offices themselves but collecting revenue from all property-owners.

It is nevertheless true that with dwindling of population many units cease to function. In a legal sense they may still exist, but in fact they are dormant or defunct. Legal dissolution may never take place, but for practical purposes the unit is gone. In compiling the data for the present revision an effort was made to ascertain the facts as to the actual operation of incorporated places

of very small populations, and to eliminate those that have ceased to operate.

3. *Organization.* Essential to the existence of a governmental unit is a continuing governmental organization. This usually consists of a legislative body, council, or board, with officers and employees to carry out its decisions, but in the case of certain small local units a single elective or appointive officer is a sufficient organization. The town or district meeting of the legal voters is an organizational feature of many thousands of local governmental units, but is not an essential.

In the case of local governments there is at least one legal prerequisite to organization, namely, a constitutional provision or legislative enactment giving the proper authorization. Since this authorization is not usually self-executing, some act on the part of the local voters either accepting organization directly or doing so by implication through the election of officers is usually a further prerequisite. Because of the many deficiencies in local records and the failure in many cases to comply with all legal requirements for proper organization the courts have developed various rules to protect the legal existence of local governments that would otherwise have difficulty in proving that they were properly organized. In this study no attempt was made to go back to original acts of organization or incorporation. The fact of present existence was accepted as sufficient.

4. *Separate Legal Identity.* Most units of government have certain characteristics of corporations,—a separate legal identity, a legal personality which can sue and be sued in its own name, and "continuous succession" or continuity of legal existence whatever changes occur in the population. Place and area are more important as preservers of identity than inhabitants. Unfortunately there is so much confusion in statutes and judicial decisions concerning the corporateness of local governments that corporateness as such is not set forth here as an essential of a unit of government. In the case of some operating local units the courts have even denied that they are corporations although to a layman they seem to have all the necessary characteristics.

Even when corporateness is denied, however, a separate legal existence is generally admitted. This test is important not only in a positive sense to identify local units of government but also negatively, to exclude certain non-units. Thus numerous boards—park boards, library boards, welfare boards, and boards of health, for example

—are viewed by the courts as mere agents or departments of the city or county to which they are attached, and not as separate persons or corporations. Similarly numerous areas or districts, for purposes of elections, special assessments, and judicial administration, for instance, are without the separate legal identity that is necessary to give them status as separate units of government. In discussing the matter in this way the rather futile debate over the legal distinction between true "municipal corporations" and so-called "quasi-corporations" has been avoided.

5. *Autonomy, or Degree of Independence.* In many cases there are within the same area two or more local agencies exercising governmental authority. A city, a school district, and a housing authority may occupy the same area. When this is the case it is not always easy to determine whether there are several separate units of government, or a single one operating through several agencies or departments. It is most important in these cases to determine the degree of independence possessed by each of the operating agencies. Any one that has its own powers and functions conferred on it by law and a reasonable measure of power in determining its own policies and raising and spending money deserves classification as a separate unit of government. Where consolidation has taken place, however, as, for example, where a city and county occupy the same area but are really governed as one by a single board or council, only a single unit of government may be said to exist.

Absolute independence is, of course, out of the question for any local unit. The nation itself can hardly claim it, in view of its international obligations and its dependence on the states in many internal matters. Certainly the states or commonwealths cannot claim independence or autonomy in an absolute sense. For local units, autonomy exists only in a relative sense and to a small extent vis-à-vis the state, but as against other local authorities the degree of independence is usually much greater.

In the larger cities, and to some extent in counties and small municipalities, numerous boards, commissions, committees, and departments exist whose dependence upon the corporation is so clear and close that one cannot class them as separate units at all. This is true even in some cases where they once had more independence and are even today designated as corporations in laws or charters. The old corporate status has in some cases withered away, while the dependence upon the central municipal corporation (city, village, or

county) has been increased by statute or established by judicial decision. In some cases the courts have spoken of such entities as "mere departments" of the city, village, or county. These have been excluded from the enumeration of units.

6. *Governmental Powers and Functions.* Each entity that is to be classed as a unit of government should be one that is entrusted and empowered by law to perform some governmental service or services. The range of these is already very wide and is ever broadening. Public utilities like water and electricity supply are certainly to be included, and so are public housing, irrigation and drainage projects, and many more. Many units of government are entrusted with only a single important function, such as education. These units may be called "unifunctional." Others have several or many services to perform, and these are in varying degrees "multifunctional."

7. *Fiscal Independence.* The power to raise a revenue by taxation, or by special assessment, or by fixing and collecting rates, charges, or rents for services rendered, must be considered one of the most important criteria for distinguishing units from non-units. A certain amount of fiscal independence seems indispensable to genuine autonomy in the performance of service functions. It is recognized, of course, that all states and most local units of government today get some funds from grants-in-aid, and that none has absolute independence in financial matters. Nevertheless mere spending agencies that have no power to raise even a part of their own revenue are not considered to be separate units of government in this study.

Differently stated, mere "spending" bodies are not counted as units, but "revenue raising and spending" authorities are counted. The term "taxing district" so often used is somewhat too narrow, since it seems to emphasize the power to levy and collect ordinary property taxes. If that term were adopted some important units with powers to levy special assessments or to determine and collect utility rates might be excluded merely because they raise money in one way rather than another. Under a strict use of the term, governing bodies that certify their tax levies to some other agency for levy and collection might also be excluded even though the latter body is required by law to make the levy certified. This would seem to be too narrow an interpretation. Our definition includes almost all taxing districts, but it includes some others which, while they do not actually levy their own taxes, are entitled to a

revenue that some other body must raise for them and turn over to them for expenditure.

It will be noticed that the test of fiscal independence here stated is not a very positive or precise one. Neither is it entirely distinct from the autonomy test in item 5, above. In fact, the various tests here stated must be considered more or less together, and the decision as to whether an entity is a separate unit or not must be based upon a weighing of all the factors concerned.

#### DEFINITION

Summarizing the foregoing characteristics, a unit of government may be defined as a resident population occupying a defined area that has a legally authorized organization and governing body, a separate legal identity, the power to provide certain public or governmental services, and a substantial degree of autonomy including legal and actual power to raise at least a part of its own revenue.

#### ENTITIES THAT ARE NOT UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

Having developed something in the nature of a positive or constructive idea of what a unit of government is, we might next proceed to clear the ground by listing certain entities that are not properly classed as units of government. These are of several kinds but principally two.

##### AREAS THAT ARE NOT UNITS

For administrative and other purposes, every government that covers a large area is likely to have to divide the area into convenient districts. The national government does this for the whole United States for many different purposes. Federal reserve bank districts, postal districts, customs collection districts, judicial districts, and many others might be mentioned. Each state does about the same thing, and so do many counties, cities, and other units. These areas or districts may be roughly classified as follows:

1. Election districts
  - a. Voting precincts
  - b. Wards for electing aldermen, etc.
  - c. County commissioner districts
  - d. State representative and senatorial districts
  - e. Congressional districts
  - f. Judicial election districts
2. Judicial administration
  - a. Judicial districts
  - b. Judicial circuits

3. Civil administrative districts
  - a. Highway, road, and street maintenance districts
  - b. Health districts
  - c. Police districts and precincts
  - d. Fire protection districts
  - e. Tax assessment and collection districts
  - f. Relief districts
  - g. School attendance and supervision districts
  - h. Inspection districts (hotels, restaurants, etc.)
  - i. Forest protection districts
  - j. Game and fish protection districts.
4. Local improvement and special assessment districts of all kinds.

The number of these districts in any state is likely to be very large. Furthermore, district areas for different purposes usually do not coincide and the citizen is confused by the complexity of the situation in his own locality. As a matter of fact, the particular boundaries of many of these districts are of little or no direct concern to the lay citizen. Only public officials really need to know them.

Some of the more inflated guesses as to the number of local units in the United States seem to result in part from the inclusion of many of these districts or areas in the total. They have practically none of the characteristics of units of government and are properly omitted from our enumeration. They have no governmental organization, no corporate existence, and no powers. They are mainly geographical expressions, and belong to the field of administrative geography.

##### AUTHORITIES THAT ARE NOT UNITS

As already mentioned, there are many authorities in the field of state and local government that cannot be counted as separate units. The national government also has some such authorities, as exemplified by the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, and many others.

In the state and local field these authorities usually go under the generic titles of boards, commissions, commissioners, and departments. The state governments have many of them, the larger cities also many, and the counties and towns relatively few. A typical list for large cities would include a number of the following: a library board, a park board, a public utilities board, a recreation commission, a city planning commission, a civil service commission, a board of finance, a pension or retirement board, a board of relief



or public welfare, a hospital board, a board of health, and an election commission.

Some large cities such as Detroit and Los Angeles have deliberately planned their organizations to include a number of such authorities from the start, but in other cases they have been added one at a time as need arose. One result of this development is that organization charts for large cities show large clusters or constellations of these authorities grouped about the mayor and council. In some cases a particular board may outshine the council itself.

Many of these authorities have such an independent status under the charter and laws that they seem to be little units of government by themselves. They are often successful in suits against the council to retain or enlarge their own powers. Some of them are practically corporations, as indeed some of them are called in the laws.

The general tendency of legislation and judicial decisions today is to limit the autonomy of these entities, and to hold them to be mere departments or agencies of the municipal corporation. Examinations of a number of them led to the conclusion that they were not separate units of government according to the definition evolved, and they were accordingly excluded from the enumeration. Public housing authorities represent a borderline case; some of them are autonomous governmental units and some are not.

#### OTHER ENTITIES EXCLUDED

Certain national and state laws provide that citizens in various districts may band together voluntarily for purposes of agricultural credit, consumers' credit, rural electrification, mutual insurance, telephone systems, control of grazing, and many other functions. There are also numerous pension and retirement associations among public employees. A few of these are distinctly borderline cases, but they have been excluded from consideration for various reasons, mainly because they perform no governmental functions, exercise no governmental powers, are based on voluntary membership, or seem to be on the whole essentially private undertakings.

#### DIFFICULTIES IN APPLYING DEFINITION OF A GOVERNMENTAL UNIT

The elimination of the various areas, authorities, and other entities mentioned in the preceding section does not solve all the problems in applying the definition of a unit of government. Even when rather full information is available,

there are many marginal and doubtful cases. Each collaborator gave his judgment concerning units in his own state or in the class of entities with which he was especially familiar. It was the duty of the author to harmonize these judgments as fully as possible on the basis of the available information.

One purpose in making this enumeration has been to establish a base line for measuring increases and decreases in the numbers of units in different categories as they occur. One way in which decreases can take place is through "vertical consolidation." That is to say, a county and a city, or a city and a school district occupying the same area become so united under a single government that there are no longer two separate units, but only one. This one may be a city-county, for example. At this point arises a certain confusion. Those who consider only county administration might well say that there are 3,097 counties (or their equivalents) in the United States, while we say that there are only 3,050 that can be counted as *separate units of government*. The others either lack organization and do not function or they are so thoroughly consolidated with certain cities as to have ceased to be distinct county units.

A similar problem arises in connection with school districts. Those who center their whole attention on public school administration count each Massachusetts town, for example, as a separate school district. We say that each such town is a separate *area* within which public schools are administered but that there are *no* school districts whatever in these towns, i.e., none in the sense of separate units of government.

In Massachusetts the town is the basic unit of local government. The town meeting is the governing body of the town. It levies taxes and adopts budgets. For administrative purposes it operates through two principal subordinate agencies—the town board of supervisors for all ordinary municipal purposes, and the school committee for educational purposes. Neither of these agencies decides upon its own taxes, enjoys a true corporate status, or acts upon its own responsibility in major matters. For these reasons each town is called one unit of government, and there is no separate school unit to enumerate.

From several southern states we received reports of very considerable numbers of school districts. In some of them, the laws indicate that the county is the area for school administration, and that in this area a board manages the schools and provides by taxation for their support. On

further examination it appeared that in some states reporting separate school districts the districts are very little more than attendance districts, in others they are attendance districts but also have some sort of local committee, and in still other cases they can raise additional funds by taxes and even appoint the teacher. In the latter cases it seems proper to count these entities as units. When the main power of control and revenue-raising is vested in the county unit, that unit is considered by us to be the true school unit.

In reaching decisions upon these and many other cases, many errors of judgment have probably been made. It is particularly difficult to know how the laws are applied and interpreted. Because there is so much room for error in decisions of this type, and because units differ so much among themselves, and are so hard to define in numerous marginal cases, our data may be used for statistical purposes only with the greatest caution.

#### LAYERS OF GOVERNMENTAL UNITS

It is only as a concept of the mind, and certainly not as a physical reality, that we can speak of the several "layers" or "levels" of governmental units. Nevertheless there is a certain hierarchy or order of priority among such entities that is recognized by everyone. At the upper levels, the rank of each type of unit corresponds roughly with its constitutional or legal status. At the lower levels, i.e., in the field of local government, where one type of unit is not as a rule legally superior to another, there are other tests of priority to apply, such as the importance or breadth of the functions performed.

In the United States we generally recognize the following tiers or levels of units of government:

- A. Units of central government
  1. The nation
  2. The states
- B. Units of local government
  3. The counties (and parishes)
  4. Cities, villages, boroughs, incorporated towns, towns, and townships
  5. School districts
  6. Other special districts

There are, of course, a number of units that do not fit neatly into this classification. These exceptional or irregular entities include such units as the District of Columbia, interstate bodies like the Port of New York Authority, and metropolitan authorities such as that which handles water

supply, sewage disposal, and other functions for the Boston area.

In any state, the citizen is subject to the national and state governments, and to a varying number of local units. At the simplest there will be one local government, as in those cities of Virginia that are independent of the surrounding counties. Generally in the South, in certain western states, and in New England, the number of levels of local government directly affecting the average person is relatively small. In the states from New York to North Dakota and south to Kansas, Missouri, and the Ohio River, the situation is more complex. The average citizen in those states is in direct contact with three levels of local government: the county; the city or village (urban) or township (rural); and the school district. There may also be special districts in addition to these. In certain large cities, notably in Chicago, the number of layers of governmental units is considerably larger.

The units enumerated in Table 1 fall naturally into two main groups—central and local. The distinctions between these classes are not based upon differences in size of area or population. There are many counties in the West with areas larger than some eastern states, and there are a number of cities and counties with populations larger than those of some states, both East and West. The essential differences between central and local units of government arise from their constitutional status and purposes.

The nation itself, with certainty, and the 48 states, though more doubtfully, may be classed as units of *central government*. Together these units, their governments, and their respective relations to each other (national-state, and interstate) constitute what may properly be called the "federal system."

All other units may be designated as units of *local government*. The "system of local government" consists, then, of these various local units, their governments, and their respective relations to each other and to the central governments which control them.

#### THE UNITED STATES AS A UNIT

The first unit of government in Table 1 is the United States taken as a whole, with its government for the entire nation centered in Washington, D. C. Since there is no other comparable unit within the country, and since its adequacy for the purposes of national self-government in the modern world is hardly open to question, it does not seem necessary to discuss it at length

in a study devoted largely to local government.

The significant things about the United States as a single unit of national government seem to be: (1) the tremendous and rapid increase in national area, population, and wealth since 1789; (2) the stabilization of the continental land area after the Gadsden Purchase in 1853; (3) the marked recession in the rate of population growth in recent decades; (4) the rapid exploitation of natural resources; (5) the movement of population out of great rural areas after the resources were used up or were found inadequate for an American standard of living; (6) the corresponding concentration of population in urban centers; and (7) the tremendous increase of governmental services in recent decades. Some of these factors have had more effect upon the local units of government than upon the central government, but their influence is felt all along the line.

#### THE STATES AS UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

The number of the federated American states or commonwealths increased from 13 to 48 between 1790 and 1912. Of the original 13 the largest was Virginia, then 64,284 square miles, and the smallest was Rhode Island, 1,067 square miles. Delaware had the smallest population (59,096), and Virginia the largest (747,610). The average area of these states was less than 26,000 square miles, and the average population was 279,683.

To reveal the tremendous increase in scale down to the present day it is only necessary to give the corresponding figures from the 1940 census. Rhode Island is still the smallest state in area, but the largest now is Texas, with 263,644 square miles of land area. The state with the smallest population today is Nevada (110,247), and New York has the largest (13,479,142). The present average state area is 62,022 square miles in land area, or about the same as that of the largest state in 1790, and the present average population (2,729,295) is nearly 10 times the average population in 1790. In fact the average state population today is two-thirds of the 1790 population of all the original 13; and 9 different states have today more population each than all had at the first census.

These great increases in the numbers of states, in the average areas of states, and in the populations to be served have been accompanied also by great increases in wealth, in public services, and in public revenues and expenditures. The increases have not resulted in making all states more nearly uniform in population and wealth,

or in raising them all up to a desirable minimum of capacity for the performance of normal state functions. On the contrary the spread has become ever greater.

The largest state in land area in 1790 was only about 60 times as large as the smallest. Today the difference is about 250 to 1. In population the largest original state was only about 12 times as large as the smallest. The spread in 1940 between New York and Nevada was 122 to 1. In wealth and in taxpaying ability the difference between New York and the poorest states is today almost equally great. It must be evident, therefore, that while states may be equal before the law and in Senate representation, they are markedly unequal in their capacities to perform the services expected of a modern commonwealth. It is partly because so many states are quite unequal to their tasks that we find so general a tendency in the less populous states to seek the aid and intervention of the national government.

There is another reason why today so many states fall short of expectations. The boundary lines set for them in bygone centuries, and fixed either for the purpose of royal land grants or for some other purpose unrelated to the problems of modern administration, have become noticeably unsuited to present-day needs. It is not only because industry and commerce have become national in scope, but also because great metropolitan communities have grown up that straddle the boundaries of several states. To solve the local administrative problems of the Chicago region alone, three or four states must cooperate. The New York metropolitan community has a similar problem, and others have a like situation.

Such conditions seem to call either for changes in the boundaries of existing state units, or for the creation of a new type of metropolitan district in which state lines can be ignored. To bring about changes in state boundaries is, of course, a very difficult matter under the Federal Constitution. (Art. IV, sec. 3, par. 1.) A fair exchange of territory of about equal taxpaying ability might obtain the needed consent of the legislatures of the states concerned, but any change of boundaries that might result in the loss by any state of large taxable wealth would be strongly resisted.

#### NEW INTERSTATE UNITS NEEDED

On a limited scale, without state boundary changes, it may be possible to set up various new interstate units of government to solve some of the problems of metropolitan areas that cut

across the boundaries of several states. The New York-New Jersey Port of New York Authority may be the forerunner of other units of this kind. The states in the Tennessee valley, those in the Colorado River basin, and other groups, may find reasons for uniting in common administrative organizations for limited purposes.

The establishment of large new regional governments to take the place of the state units for many purposes has been frequently discussed, but the suggestion has not yet reached the stage of official proposal. All that can be said at present is that this and other suggestions point to a great deal of dissatisfaction among informed people with the areas of states now existing as units of government.

Set off against this present feeling of discontent with existing state boundaries is the fact that many of our states compare very favorably in size, population, and wealth with a number of independent foreign states, each of which, standing by itself, must provide for its own defense and foreign service in addition to the functions of the typical American commonwealth. Indeed the union of American states is not insignificant when compared with a group of important states such as once formed the League of Nations.

#### ARE THE STATES UNITS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

The states or commonwealths stand in a position that seems to be between that of the nation itself and that of the local governments. From having been at one time "sovereign and independent states," as the original 13 claimed to be, they have changed their status by creating or entering "an indestructible union, composed of indestructible states." Having lost even the right of secession, they now face the possibility, to say the least, of a further diminution of their power and autonomy. Some writers are, in fact, beginning to look upon them as already belonging essentially in the ranks of local government units, "like counties in Iowa," as a Southern senator caustically expressed it.

That the states have many of the characteristics of local units cannot be gainsaid. In the nature of many of the services that they render, and in the closeness of their contact with their citizens, the states are, indeed, "local" governments. On the other hand they are something more and something different as well.

1. The states have a definite place under the Constitution in the federal system, a place not given to any local government.

2. Local governments exist only as the creatures of the state or central government within whose area they are situated, and more or less on sufferance of the central authorities. It is not so with the states.

3. The charters or statutes under which local governments conduct their affairs are handed down to them by a central government, and are subject to change by that government, without local consent. Such is not the case with the states.

4. The territorial limits and the powers of local units are also subject to change by the central government without local consent. To any proposed change of its own boundaries a state must first give consent, and any amendment changing the powers of the national vis-à-vis state governments must be approved by three-fourths of the states.

5. Local governments cannot themselves create other local governments. The states can and do.

6. Local governments are in many, if not in all respects, agents of the central government that created and controls them, and have only such powers as the state confers upon them. In only a limited sense are the states agents of the national government.

7. As agents of the states, local governments are engaged mainly in the administrative tasks of enforcing the laws enacted by the state government, and of providing the services authorized by it. The states have a wide range of legislative power and discretion to determine not only what their own activities shall be, but also to determine and control those of the local units.

#### THE CLASSES OF LOCAL UNITS

The nation as a unit and the 48 states are hardly susceptible of further classification, but it is not so with the tens of thousands of local units. They exist under many laws and have many legal and popular class names, some of which are particularly confusing. Thus in Minnesota the politically organized unit popularly called a "township" (an area usually six miles square and generally rural) is legally designated as "town," but in England and in various parts of the United States "town" means a built-up urban settlement. Even in Minnesota the farmer "goes to town," meaning the city or village, to sell his produce and do his buying. In the face of such a confusing terminology it is necessary to have some significant criteria for distinguishing local units from each other according to their real differences, and for grouping into appropriate classes those that are substantially similar.



## CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFYING LOCAL UNITS

1. *Major and Minor Divisions.* Proceeding, as it were, downward from the nation to and through the states, the next territorial unit in rank or order of size is usually called a "county," but in Louisiana it is denominated "parish." Below it in turn are territorial units of smaller size. Actually the distinction according to rank, or higher and lower levels, is based on a mere figure of speech. Counties are not necessarily higher in rank than their subdivisions, but they certainly are larger in area. Hence a first distinction should probably be that between "major" and "minor" divisions of the state's area.

2. *Territorial Inclusiveness.* Some units of local government are intentionally planned to include all the state's area, whereas others are designed to fit the needs of particular localities without any thought that they will reach the whole area. Hence a valid distinction can be made between those classes of units that are territorially inclusive of the whole state and those that are not.

3. *Urban or Rural Character.* Those units that are not territorially inclusive of the whole state are likely to be designed either for urban groups, or for rural areas, or for some functional area that is partly urban and partly rural. Among such units it is important to know whether they are urban or primarily urban, or rural or primarily rural. As population moves about and especially from city to country, units that were intended to be primarily rural may take on significant urban characteristics and functions.

4. *Functions: State or Local.* The state desires certain functions, such as the support of courts and law enforcement, and the collection of taxes, to be carried on throughout its whole area. Others are of more local concern, such as parks, sidewalks, and street lighting. The line between these two groups is not always sharp and clear, but the broad distinction is generally understood. It is possible and sometimes desirable, therefore, to distinguish between various types of local units on the basis of whether their functions are primarily of state or essentially of local concern.

5. *Number of Functions.* Some units of government are granted the power to perform a single function, or a few closely related ones, whereas others get powers to provide a very wide range of services whether of state or local interest. The terms "unifunctional" and "multifunctional" would be accurately descriptive, but it may be just as well in most cases to use the terms "special" and "general" in connection with their functions.

6. *Government or Service Agency.* A number of local units, districts, or authorities, have been created primarily to render a noncoercive public service like public housing or operating a water and light plant, whereas others are more in the nature of governments, to help maintain law and order. This criterion or distinction is not always easy to apply and will not receive as much attention as some others.

## FOUR PRINCIPAL CLASSES OF LOCAL UNITS

In practice some of the foregoing criteria are closely allied to others. They work, as it were, in groups, and the number of really different classes of local units is not as large as the various criteria might suggest. In fact there are in practice only four major classes of local governmental units with certain subclasses that will be mentioned. Since names like county, township, and town really tell nothing about the characteristics of different units, it is important to remember these classes by the descriptive titles given below.

1. The first class of local units consists of the *major and inclusive divisions of the state area for general state purposes.* These are designated as counties in most of the states and as parishes in Louisiana. All will be referred to as counties hereafter. In one state, Rhode Island, the county exists as an area but is not a unit of government. This state itself is only a little larger in area than the average American county (1,058 square miles, as against 961). In all other states, the counties are units of government, although their functional and financial importance is not everywhere equally large, and is rather minor in the New England states generally. In those states the town serves largely as the agent of the state for general state purposes.

Counties are described above as *major* because they are the principal or largest territorial divisions of the state for purposes of local government. They are *inclusive* because in any state they usually include the whole area of the state. Thus, if all the county areas and the District of Columbia were added together, the resulting figure would represent almost the total land area of the United States.

Counties that are units of government have varied functions, as a rule. These were originally functions of general and state-wide interest that the legislature desired to have performed uniformly throughout the state area. Today county functions are still largely of this nature, but others, often of a more limited and local concern, have in recent years been added to them.

Below this first class of major units stand two classes of minor subdivisions or "minor civil divisions" as the Bureau of the Census calls them. Taken together these two classes may include the whole state area but in many states that have both classes they do not; and another large group of states has only one of these classes.

2. The second class of local units (the first class of these minor subdivisions) may be described as *special incorporations in urban or partly urban places for general purposes of local government and service*. Many examples are to be found in every state in the Union. Washington, D. C., is essentially of this class, although functionally it partakes also in part of the character of a county, and in part of that of a state.

The particular legal titles given to these special incorporations vary greatly from state to state. *City*, for the larger, and *town* or *village*, for the smaller units of this class, are the most common names, but the term *borough* is also found in Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. In the states where neither the New England "town system" nor the land-survey "township system" of local units prevails, i.e., in the South and West generally, "town" is commonly used to designate the smaller special incorporations, while in the Northeastern and Midwestern states they are usually denominated "villages." There is no uniformity of practice, however, and in Oklahoma, Indiana, Iowa, and several other Midwestern states the minor urban incorporated places are called "towns" and the 6-mile square rural subdivisions are called "townships." This confusion in terminology often leads to misunderstanding.

The characteristics of these special incorporations are everywhere very much the same. (1) Their areas are usually small, varying from a fraction of a square mile up to several hundred square miles. Taken all together they do not occupy more than 3 per cent of the land area of the United States, and 2 per cent is probably a much closer estimate. (2) In these limited areas there are, as a rule, much denser settlements of population than in the surrounding countryside, and their combined population amounts to 61.6 per cent of the national total. (3) As a rule their areas and peoples remain for county purposes as a part of the county or counties in which they are situated but are set off by law as separate corporations for providing the varied local services required in urban places. (4) Their corporate status is generally that of true municipal corporations. (5) Many of them have special charters,

or are incorporated under general laws that are often referred to as the local charter. (6) Their functions are numerous and highly varied.

3. A third class of units (the second class of minor subdivisions) may be described as *subdivisions of the county in rural areas for rural local purposes*. These include "towns" in the New England and a few Middle Atlantic states, and the usually rectangular "towns" or "townships" based upon the congressional land-survey townships in many of the public land states. In the New England states, and also in the vicinity of large cities in other states, many of these units are highly urbanized and of large population, with correspondingly important functions, and are not easily distinguished from the urban incorporated places mentioned above, but toward the West and South their importance tends to diminish until one reaches states where over large areas none has been organized. In one or another form they are found today in 22 states.

The characteristics of these units are as follows: (1) They are intermediate in area between the county and the small incorporated places called villages. Usually they do not exceed the 36 square miles of the survey township. (2) They are generally rural, except in New England and in the vicinity of large urban centers in other states. (3) For county purposes they remain as parts of the county area, but they have a separate corporate or quasi-corporate status under general laws. (4) Their functions are fairly numerous, are partly of state-wide and partly of local interest, and are basically of a rural nature, although urban functions have been added where needed, especially in New England.

4. The last class of units consists of a great variety of *special or ad hoc districts, created for special purposes*. *School districts* are the most numerous and most widely known species in this general class, but there are hundreds of other species, existing under many different names, and for unnumbered special purposes. There are no states that are without some units falling in this large class although Oklahoma and South Dakota report only school districts.

These units vary greatly in size and population. They frequently cut across the boundaries of other units, including boundaries of counties and even, in a few cases, of states. They are usually organized for a single purpose each, such as providing a common school, or for a few closely related functions, such as those connected with drainage and sanitation. In legal status they are usually corporate or quasi-corporate.

TABLE 3. NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE PRINCIPAL CLASSES OF UNITS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, ARRANGED BY STATES, AS OF JANUARY, 1941, AND A COMPARISON WITH TOTALS OF 1930-33

	1930-33 TOTALS	1941 TOTALS	Counties	Incorp Places	Townships	School Districts	Other Special Districts
Alabama .....	475	469	67	268	—	111	23
Arizona .....	574	536	14	33	—	406	83
Arkansas .....	4,491	3,618	75	387	—	2,920	236
California .....	4,277	4,052	57	284	—	2,848	863
Colorado .....	2,429	2,410	62	245	—	2,050	53
Connecticut .....	355	347	8	38	154	15	132
Delaware .....	268	211	3	52	—	155	1
District of Columbia .....	1	1	—	1	—	—	—
Florida .....	1,456	1,517	67	281	—	904	265
Georgia .....	754	2,000	159	459	—	1,250	132
Idaho .....	1,679	1,495	44	151	—	1,195	105
Illinois .....	17,336	15,629	102	1,138	1,436	12,129	824
Indiana .....	1,830	3,032	92	536	1,016	1,183	205
Iowa .....	7,497	7,585	99	933	1,609	4,869	75
Kansas .....	11,072	11,206	105	588	1,550	8,650	313
Kentucky .....	898	686	120	281	—	262	23
Louisiana .....	501	646	63	192	—	64	327
Maine .....	562	546	16	48	480	—	2
Maryland .....	161	182	23	140	—	—	19
Massachusetts .....	431	470	13	39	312	—	106
Michigan .....	8,905	8,295	83	476	1,266	6,466	4
Minnesota .....	10,544	10,409	87	751	1,883	7,687	1
Mississippi .....	6,639	6,133	82	271	—	5,104	676
Missouri .....	11,626	10,992	114	793	345	8,652	1,088
Montana .....	2,667	2,204	56	115	—	1,875	158
Nebraska .....	8,455	8,509	93	530	477	7,192	217
Nevada .....	364	337	17	12	—	282	26
New Hampshire .....	489	497	10	11	224	244	8
New Jersey .....	1,149	1,293	21	331	235	553	153
New Mexico .....	195	189	31	63	—	81	14
New York .....	11,184	8,329	57	611	932	6,433	296
North Carolina .....	2,008	805	100	369	—	176	160
North Dakota .....	4,080	4,118	53	332	1,405	2,272	56
Ohio .....	4,487	4,216	88	884	1,341	1,673	230
Oklahoma .....	6,430	5,239	77	518	—	4,644	—
Oregon .....	2,500	2,477	36	195	—	2,015	231
Pennsylvania .....	5,583	5,200	66	987	1,577	2,549	21
Rhode Island .....	93	96	—	7	32	—	57
South Carolina .....	2,116	2,059	46	248	—	1,738	27
South Dakota .....	4,981	4,919	64	302	1,124	3,429	—
Tennessee .....	536	468	95	204	—	160	9
Texas .....	8,676	7,828	254	654	—	6,579	341
Utah .....	267	353	29	199	—	40	85
Vermont .....	626	648	14	75	238	273	48
Virginia .....	317	318	100	208	—	—	10
Washington .....	2,423	2,124	39	221	73	1,411	380
West Virginia .....	673	268	55	204	—	—	9
Wisconsin .....	9,762	9,514	71	513	1,289	7,394	247
Wyoming .....	547	525	23	84	—	375	43
TOTAL .....	175,369	165,000	3,050	16,262	18,998	118,308	8,382

## TOTAL NUMBERS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL UNITS

Table 3 gives the number of local units of each of the principal classes, by states. These figures will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, but a few general comments are perhaps necessary.

In Part I the increases and decreases in units of local government in the decade of the 1930's

ages, however, are shown to be misleading when the data are analyzed by geographical regions.

## REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

Students of local government are well aware of certain regional differences in the pattern of local government in the United States. The New England states emphasize the town and city, and

TABLE 4. REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF UNITS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, RANKED ACCORDING TO NUMBER OF UNITS, AND AREA AND POPULATION PER UNIT, 1941

Region	Population 1940	Area 1940	No. of Loc. Units	Rank Order	Av. Area per Unit	Rank Order	Av. Pop. per Unit	Rank Order
New England....	8,437,290	63,206	2,604	1	24.3	4 <sup>a</sup>	3,240	1
Middle Atlantic..	30,290,327	112,422	15,216	5	7.3	7	1,991	3
South Atlantic....	15,072,311	256,505	6,967	2	38.1	2	2,163	2
South Central....	23,842,750	611,397	25,087	.6	24.3	4 <sup>a</sup>	950	5
East North Central .....	26,626,342	245,011	40,686	7	6.0	8	654	6
West North Central .....	13,516,990	510,621	57,738	8	8.8	6	234	8
Mountain .....	4,150,003	857,836	8,049	3	106.5	1	514	7
Pacific .....	9,733,262	320,130	8,653	4	36.9	3	1,125	4
TOTAL IN U.S....	131,669,275	2,977,128	165,000		18.0		798	

<sup>a</sup>These regions tie for fourth place.

*New England:* Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont  
*Middle Atlantic:* Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania

*South Atlantic:* Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia

*South Central:* Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas

*East North Central:* Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin

*West North Central:* Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota

*Mountain:* Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming

*Pacific:* California, Oregon, Washington

were shown for the country as a whole. Table 3, the most comprehensive and important in this study, shows the present numbers of local units by states and by principal types.

The first edition of this work reported 175,369 local units of government. The present study finds the number to have been 165,000 as of January, 1941, a net reduction of 10,369.

Despite substantial reductions in the number of school districts during the past decade, they still account for 71.7 per cent of all local governmental units. Towns and townships make up 11.5 per cent, incorporated places 9.8 per cent, special districts other than school 5 per cent, and counties 1.8 per cent of the total. These ratios changed very little in the decade.

For the country as a whole there is one unit of government for every 800 people and for every 18 square miles of land area. These national aver-

ages, however, are shown to be misleading when the data are analyzed by geographical regions. thus can get along with relatively few counties, school districts, and other special districts. The South Atlantic and South Central states center general local government in their counties, have proportionately few incorporated places, and no organized townships, but do indulge a penchant for special districts for school and other purposes. The Mountain and Pacific coast regions have systems much like those in the South, but have proportionately more incorporated places and special districts. In the Atlantic and East North Central regions in addition to a layer of counties there is usually a fairly complete layer of minor divisions (incorporated places and organized townships) as well as a layer of school districts, plus a number of other special districts. In the West North Central region this three-level system is repeated and brought to its highest peak so far as numbers in proportion to population are

concerned. As in the report on the 1930-33 study, the West North Central region remains the "high pressure area" of American local units. With only 10 per cent of the national population this region has more than a third of all local government units in the United States.

When individual states are considered Illinois still leads the nation with 15,629 local governmental units (Table 3.) Below it in rank order stand Kansas (11,206), Missouri (10,992), Minnesota (10,409), Wisconsin (9,514), Nebraska (8,509), New York (8,329), Michigan (8,295), Texas (7,828), and Iowa (7,585). Only Texas in this list lies outside the general region of highest concentration of units, and its tremendous area, equal to about four average states, helps to explain its large number of local governments.

At the bottom of the list stand Rhode Island

population or area of a region by the number of local units of all kinds.

In Table 5 each general type of unit is taken by itself and the regional analysis is made on the basis of the number of each type of unit per 100,000 population in the region. The New England region is lowest in incorporated places and school districts per 100,000, and also lowest overall, whereas the Middle Atlantic is lowest in counties, in towns and townships (among the four regions that really have them), and in special districts other than school. The Mountain region is highest in counties per 100,000 inhabitants, the Pacific region in special districts other than school, and the West North Central leads in incorporated places, organized townships, and school districts, as well as in the over-all numbers of units per 100,000 population. The difference between

TABLE 5. NUMBER OF UNITS IN CERTAIN CLASSES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS PER 100,000 POPULATION, BY REGIONS, 1941

Region	Counties	Inc. Places	Towns and Townships	School Districts	Other Special Districts	TOTAL
New England .....	0.7	2.5	17.0	6.3	4.1	30.8
Middle Atlantic .....	0.5	7.0	9.0	31.9	1.6	50.2
South Atlantic .....	3.4	11.7	—	26.9	4.0	46.2
South Central .....	3.4	11.7	—	83.2	6.8	105.2
East North Central .....	1.6	13.2	23.8	108.3	5.6	152.0
West North Central .....	4.5	31.3	62.1	316.4	12.9	427.4
Mountain .....	6.6	21.7	—	151.9	13.2	193.4
Pacific .....	1.3	7.1	0.7	64.4	15.1	88.9

(96), Maryland (182), New Mexico (189), and Delaware (211), the two smallest states ranking first and fourth. Just above these four stand West Virginia (268), Virginia (318), Nevada (337), Connecticut (347), Utah (353), Tennessee (468), Alabama (469), Massachusetts (470), and New Hampshire (497). All considered, 13 states have less than 500 units each; 7 have from 500 to 1,000; 9 have from 1,000 to 3,000; 9 have from 3,000 to 7,000; and 10 have more than 7,000 units each.

Table 4 presents certain aspects of the regional differences for all local units lumped together. The rank order figures give highest rank to the smallest numbers of units and to the largest areas and populations per unit. New England has the smallest number of units, 2,604, and the largest average population per unit, 3,240, but the sparsely settled Mountain region naturally leads in largest average area per unit, 106.5 square miles. The West North Central region has the largest number of units, 57,738, and the smallest population per unit, 234, but the East North Central has the smallest area per unit, just 6 square miles. These figures are derived simply by dividing the total

the New England region with 30.8 units per 100,000 and the West North Central with 427.4 is a difference of about 1 to 14.

#### COUNTIES

The *separate areas* in the United States in and for which county services are performed number 3,097. This figure includes the 64 parish areas of Louisiana, which will hereafter be considered as counties, since they serve substantially the same purposes. The figure includes also the 24 independent cities of Virginia, discussed below, which exercise within their limits all the essential county functions, and the 5 counties of Rhode Island which exercise no functions at all.

These 3,097 areas embrace, we believe, the entire area of the United States. If there is any territory in the United States not included within a county area for at least a few purposes we are not aware of its existence.

*Areas versus Units.* Of the 3,097 areas described above as *county areas*, 3,050 have separate county governments, and are classed by us as *separate units* of government, whereas forty-seven are



## POPULATION DENSITY and Number of **UNITS** of Local Government for the Average State of the Various Regions—1941

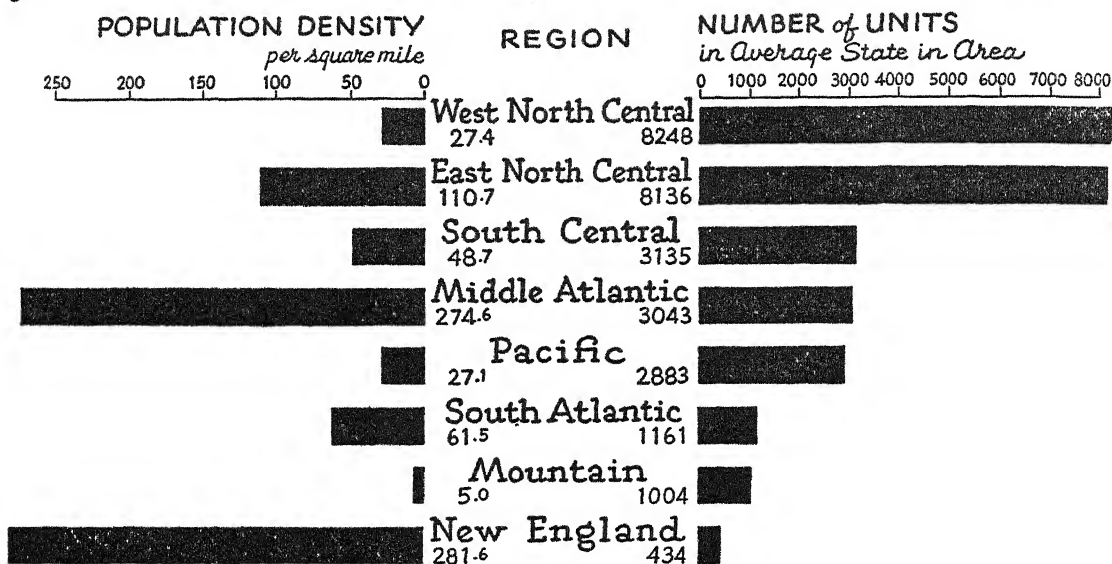


Figure 2

classed as non-units. The reasons for this classification call for some explanation. The essential county functions are in some way performed in all the 3,097 areas. These functions may be performed by other agencies, however, and to avoid duplication in the enumeration of *units* it has been necessary to draw certain distinctions, as follows:

The five counties of Rhode Island (Bristol, Kent, Newport, Providence, and Washington) are not units of local government since they have no local governing body to levy taxes or to perform the ordinary county functions.

Five counties in South Dakota are "established" as county areas but have not been organized for self-government. Such "established but not organized" counties were once well known in several Middle Western states. The practice was to designate the boundaries and names of counties well in advance of settlement, but not to create a definite county organization until the numbers and the wealth of the people warranted it. This time has not yet come for these five. Their combined areas total 5,067 square miles, and their inhabitants in 1940 numbered 14,891. Each one is attached to an adjacent county for judicial purposes (Armstrong to Stanley County; Shannon to Fall River; Todd to Tripp; Washabaugh

to Jackson; and Washington to Pennington).

*Atrophied Urban Counties.* The five county areas in the City of New York (Bronx, New York, Kings, Queens, and Richmond, corresponding in area with the boroughs of Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and Richmond, respectively) have been so denuded of functions and powers and so fully merged with the city government as to have lost their separate corporate character.

On reading the authorities we have concluded, also, that the county areas corresponding to the Cities of Baltimore, Boston (Suffolk), Denver, Philadelphia, St. Louis, New Orleans, and San Francisco have been sufficiently consolidated and merged with the city government to disappear as separate units. The question is, of course, a debatable one in several cases, but hardly so in the cases of Baltimore, the "City and County of" Denver, and San Francisco. Since the city functions are of greater importance in each case we count each of these units among the cities, but not separately as counties. The District of Columbia is likewise treated as a city, not as a county.

The same conclusion has been reached concerning the 24 independent cities of Virginia. These are essentially city governments, but they exercise also the necessary county functions. In each

# Units of LOCAL GOVERNMENT in the United States, 1941

Number of Units per 100,000 Population – by States

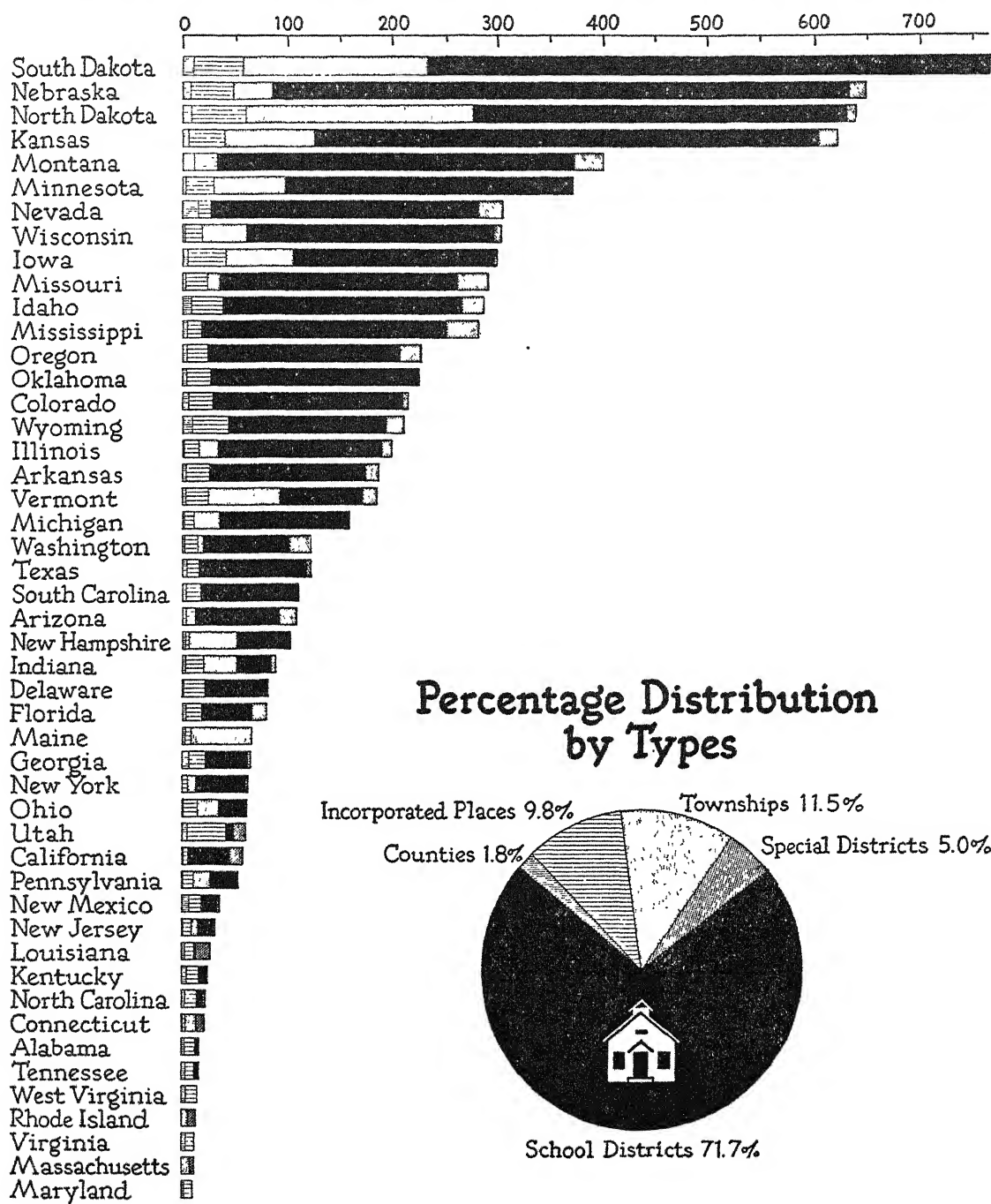


Figure 3

# Comparison of AREAS of the Largest, Average, and Smallest STATES and COUNTIES 1941

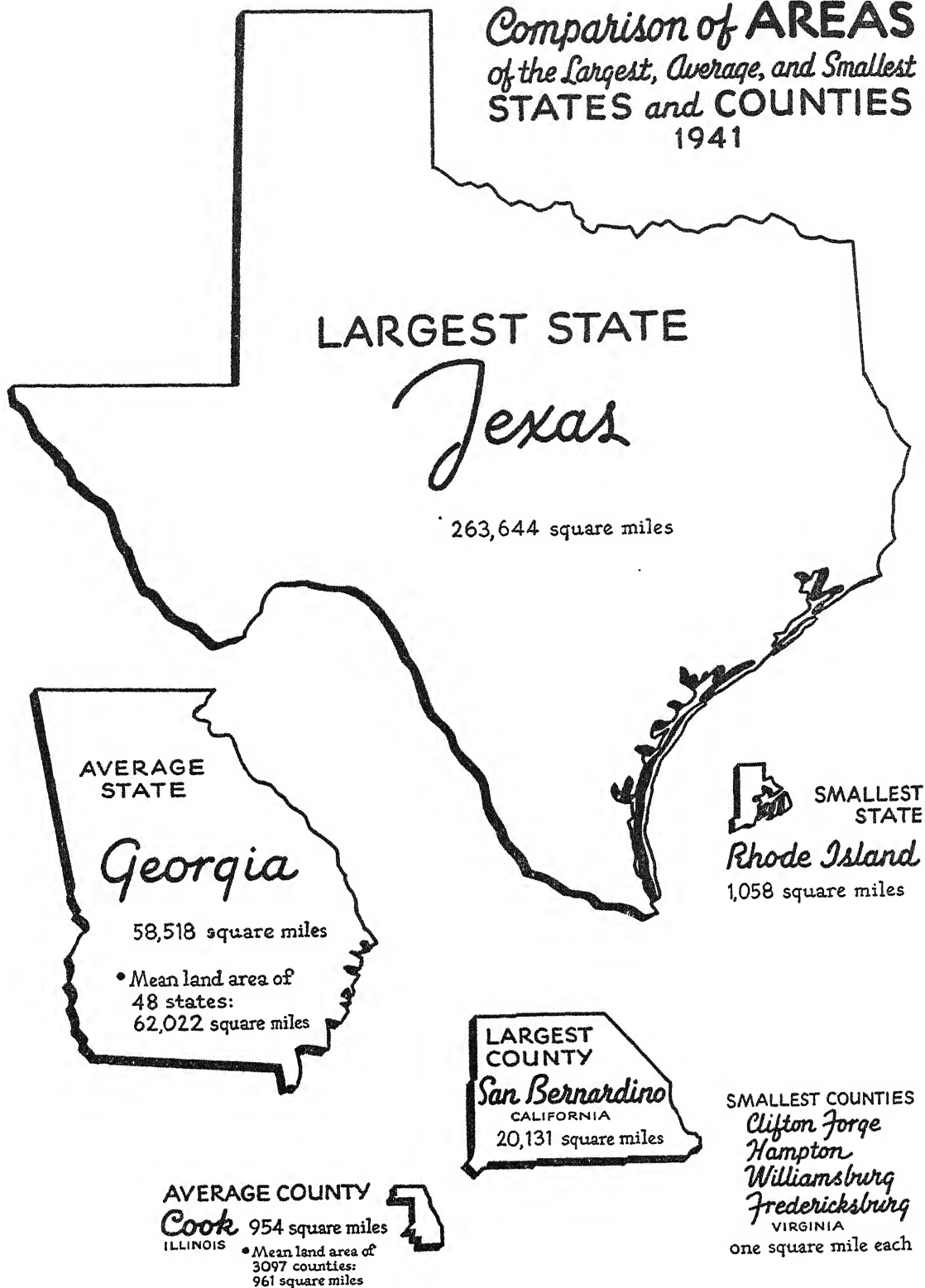


Figure 4



TABLE 6. LARGEST, SMALLEST, AND AVERAGE COUNTY AREA IN EACH STATE  
(IN SQUARE MILES)

Largest Area		Smallest Area		Average Area	Median Area	
Alabama .....	1,613	Baldwin	545	Limestone	762	677
Arizona .....	18,573	Coconino	1,246	Santa Cruz	8,113	8,661
Arkansas .....	1,052	Union	529	Sebastian	704	649
California .....	20,131	San Bernardino	45	San Francisco	2,703	1,542
Colorado .....	4,794	Las Animas	58	Denver	1,650	1,533
Connecticut .....	938	Litchfield	374	Middlesex	611	621
Delaware .....	946	Sussex	437	New Castle	659	595
Florida .....	2,054	Dade	240	Union	810	701
Georgia .....	912	Ware	125	Clarke	368	348
Idaho .....	8,515	Idaho	403	Payette	1,882	1,326
Illinois .....	1,173	McLean	166	Putnam	548	511
Indiana .....	671	Allen	87	Ohio	394	402
Iowa .....	979	Kossuth	382	Dickinson	566	571
Kansas .....	1,445	Butler	151	Wyandotte	727	729
Kentucky .....	786	Pike	100	Gallatin	334	310
Louisiana .....	1,391	Terrebonne	199	Orleans	706	662
Maine .....	6,805	Aroostook	257	Sagadahoc	1,940	1,271
Maryland .....	668	Garrett	79	Baltimore City	403	437
Massachusetts .....	1,532	Worcester	46	Nantucket	564	596
Michigan .....	1,841	Marquette	316	Benzie	687	572
Minnesota .....	6,281	St. Louis	160	Ramsey	920	681
Mississippi .....	938	Yazoo	403	Montgomery and Walthall	578	568
Missouri .....	1,183	Texas	267	Worth	602	594
Montana .....	5,556	Beaverhead	716	Silver Bow	2,613	2,351
Nebraska .....	5,982	Cherry	230	Sarpy	824	577
Nevada .....	17,140	Elko	141	Ormsby	6,458	5,621
New Hampshire .....	1,825	Coös	377	Strafford	902	803
New Jersey .....	819	Burlington	45	Hudson	358	329
New Mexico .....	7,772	Socorro	1,163	Bernalillo	3,920	3,804
New York .....	2,772	St. Lawrence	22	New York	773	663
North Carolina .....	939	Columbus	180	Chowan	491	467
North Dakota .....	2,810	McKenzie	643	Eddy	1,321	1,170
Ohio .....	706	Ashtabula	232	Lake	467	438
Oklahoma .....	2,293	Osage	414	Marshall	900	810
Oregon .....	10,132	Harvey	424	Multnomah	2,676	1,842
Pennsylvania .....	1,215	Lycoming	130	Montour	672	660
Rhode Island .....	422	Providence	25	Bristol	211	172
South Carolina .....	1,214	Berkeley	389	Calhoun	665	650
South Dakota .....	3,466	Meade	403	Clay	1,107	887
Tennessee .....	751	Shelby	116	Trousdale	442	445
Texas .....	6,208	Brewster	147	Rockwall	1,038	912
Utah .....	7,884	San Juan	268	Davis	2,839	2,425
Vermont .....	965	Windsor	77	Grand Isle	662	681
Virginia .....	1,022	Pittsylvania	1	Hampton; Clifton Forge; Williamsburg	322	330
Washington .....	5,295	Okanogan	172	San Juan	1,717	1,753
West Virginia .....	1,036	Randolph	82	Hancock	438	418
Wisconsin .....	1,592	Marathon	235	Ozaukee	771	751
Wyoming .....	10,492	Sweetwater	2,022	Hot Springs	4,063	3,176

Largest County Area: 20,131 sq. miles, San Bernardino, California

Smallest County Area: 1 sq. mile, Hampton; Clifton Forge; Williamsburg (Virginia)

Average County Area in U.S.: 961 sq. miles

## THE UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

TABLE 7. COUNTY AREAS, BY STATES AND GROUPS ACCORDING TO AREA  
(IN SQUARE MILES)

	Under 200	200- 399	400- 599	600- 799	800- 999	1,000- 1,499	1,500- 1,999	2,000- 4,999	5,000 and over
Alabama .....	—	—	12	34	12	8	1	—	—
Arizona .....	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2	10
Arkansas .....	—	—	15	42	15	3	—	—	—
California .....	1	—	4	7	4	12	6	17	7
Colorado .....	2	3	3	6	6	11	12	20	—
Connecticut .....	—	1	2	4	1	—	—	—	—
Delaware .....	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	—	—
Florida .....	—	5	19	19	8	11	3	2	—
Georgia .....	21	79	46	10	3	—	—	—	—
Idaho .....	—	—	8	3	2	12	7	10	2
Illinois .....	2	28	36	21	10	5	—	—	—
Indiana .....	5	37	48	2	—	—	—	—	—
Iowa .....	—	3	75	17	4	—	—	—	—
Kansas .....	1	2	19	37	31	15	—	—	—
Kentucky .....	16	70	30	4	—	—	—	—	—
Louisiana .....	1	8	14	19	12	10	—	—	—
Maine .....	—	2	2	1	2	1	2	5	1
Maryland .....	1	10	10	3	—	—	—	—	—
Massachusetts .....	3	1	4	3	2	—	1	—	—
Michigan .....	—	3	44	15	11	8	2	—	—
Minnesota .....	1	3	31	23	9	9	3	7	1
Mississippi .....	—	—	50	26	6	—	—	—	—
Missouri .....	—	3	57	41	13	1	—	—	—
Montana .....	—	—	—	2	2	7	12	27	6
Nebraska .....	—	7	43	17	11	9	—	5	1
Nevada .....	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	5	9
New Hampshire .....	—	1	2	2	3	—	2	—	—
New Jersey .....	4	9	6	1	1	—	—	—	—
New Mexico .....	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	19	8
New York .....	6	7	11	12	9	13	3	1	—
North Carolina .....	2	35	38	15	10	—	—	—	—
North Dakota .....	—	—	—	5	9	24	9	6	—
Ohio .....	—	5	74	9	—	—	—	—	—
Oklahoma .....	—	—	14	24	20	13	4	2	—
Oregon .....	—	—	2	5	2	4	6	12	5
Pennsylvania .....	3	8	19	13	14	10	—	—	—
Rhode Island .....	3	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Carolina .....	—	3	19	14	5	5	—	—	—
South Dakota .....	—	—	17	8	14	15	9	6	—
Tennessee .....	6	30	45	14	—	—	—	—	—
Texas .....	3	7	13	31	123	58	8	10	1
Utah .....	—	1	1	4	—	4	4	10	5
Vermont .....	1	—	2	9	2	—	—	—	—
Virginia .....	37	40	36	7	3	1	—	—	—
Washington .....	1	2	1	4	3	4	11	12	1
West Virginia .....	5	21	19	6	2	2	—	—	—
Wisconsin .....	—	8	16	15	16	15	1	—	—
Wyoming .....	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	18	5
District of Columbia ...	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL .....	127	444	910	555	401	294	108	196	62

case there is only a single governmental unit, and it is enumerated among the incorporated places.

*Range of Size of Counties.* The largest county area in the United States is that of San Bernardino County, California,—20,131 square miles. This area exceeds that of every New England state except Maine, and is also greater than the combined areas of New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland. The smallest county counted herein as being a separate unit of county government is Arlington County, Virginia,—25 square miles. The county areas not considered units run very small in area but high in population, with the exception of the five unorganized counties of South Dakota. They are, in fact, mainly urban counties. The smallest in area of these non-unit counties are Clifton Forge, Hampton, Williamsburg, and Fredericksburg, cities in Virginia, with one square mile of area each. These counties at one end of the scale and San Bernardino at the other present the extremes in areas of county administration. (See Table 6.)

Of the 3,097 county areas enumerated, the average 961 square miles in extent. The largest county is more than 20 times this size, the smallest about  $\frac{1}{10}$  of 1 per cent of it. Where the spread is so large, an average size tells very little as to the area of the typical county. The median is, in fact, just over 600 square miles, and the largest or modal group, with 920 counties in all, is the group having areas of from 400 to 599 square miles.

There are, in fact, several classes of counties. (See Table 7, for state data.) (1) In the Rocky Mountains and in the arid regions adjoining them, where population is very sparse, county areas tend to be very large. The average county area in Arizona is 8,113 square miles, in Nevada 6,458, in Wyoming 4,063, in New Mexico 3,920, and in Utah, California, Oregon, and Montana it is over 2,500 square miles. Other states in this group also have counties of large average area. (2) Numerically the largest group is that of the agricultural counties of the Middlewest and South, together with the adjacent agricultural areas in the eastern states such as New York and Pennsylvania. Within this group there are also marked differences. The larger counties are found generally west of the Mississippi. The county areas tend to be smaller toward the East and still smaller in the Southeast: Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia. The spread is from a state average of 1,038 square miles in Texas and 920 in Minnesota, to 334 in Kentucky and 368 in Georgia.

Approximately half of all the states have average county areas of more than 400 and less than 800 square miles. (3) The metropolitan or highly urbanized counties of the country, wherever found, tend to have the smallest areas. Many of them cover less than 100 square miles. The independent cities of Virginia are, of course, the smallest of all the areas for the administration of county functions.

*Variations in Population.* The most populous American county is Cook County, Illinois, with 4,063,342 inhabitants (1940). At the same census Alpine County, California, had 323 inhabitants, Loving County, Texas, had 285, and Armstrong County (unorganized), South Dakota, had 42. Between Cook and Loving Counties the difference is about 14,000 to 1, which is not quite as great as the extreme range in areas between San Bernardino County, California, and the small independent cities performing county functions in Virginia. Within the state of California alone one finds striking differences in county areas and county populations. In area, San Bernardino County has 20,131 square miles to 42 square miles for San Francisco (not classed as a separate unit). In population Alpine County with 323 inhabitants is greatly overshadowed by Los Angeles County with 2,785,643. (See Table 8.)

In general, population and area are inversely related. The largest county areas tend to have small populations, and the smallest to have large populations. St. Louis County, Minnesota, is rather unusual in having a large area (6,281 square miles) and a fairly large population (206,917).

The average county population, including both so-called units and non-units, is 42,515. This average for the nation as a whole is quite as misleading as in the case of the average area. It conceals the tremendous differences existing between the different classes of counties noted above. Nearly one-fourth of all counties have less than 10,000 inhabitants; nearly one-third range from 10,000 to 20,000; and more than one-fourth range between 20,000 and 40,000. In other words, four-fifths of all counties have less than the average population. The median county has about 17,000 inhabitants, and the largest single group of counties (501) ranges from 10,000 to 15,000 population. (See Table 9.)

Nevertheless, within any particular state the average county area is a figure of some significance for purposes of comparison with other states, and the same is true to some extent of average populations. On the basis of these state aver-

## THE UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

TABLE 8. LARGEST, SMALLEST, AVERAGE, AND MEDIAN COUNTY POPULATION IN EACH STATE

	—Largest Population—		—Smallest Population—	Average Population	Median Population
Alabama .....	459,930	Jefferson	13,460	Coosa	29,465
Arizona .....	186,193	Maricopa	8,591	Mohavi	23,981
Arkansas .....	156,085	Pulaski	8,392	Perry	24,402
California .....	2,785,643	Los Angeles	323	Alpine	28,800
Colorado .....	68,870	Pueblo	349	Hinsdale	7,197
Connecticut .....	484,316	New Haven	31,866	Tolland	106,132
Delaware .....	179,572	New Castle	34,441	Kent	52,502
Florida .....	267,739	Dade	3,000	Okeechobee	12,550
Georgia .....	392,866	Fulton	2,964	Echols	12,764
Idaho .....	50,401	Ada	1,005	Clark	9,019
Illinois .....	4,063,342	Cook	5,289	Putnam	23,934
Indiana .....	460,926	Marion	3,782	Ohio	21,934
Iowa .....	195,835	Polk	10,156	Adams	16,379
Kansas .....	145,071	Wyandotte	1,443	Stanton	11,969
Kentucky .....	385,392	Jefferson	3,419	Robertson	16,526
Louisiana .....	150,203	Caddo	7,203	Cameron	23,933
Maine .....	146,000	Cumberland	16,294	Lincoln	38,006
Maryland .....	155,825	Baltimore	10,484	Calvert	26,407
Massachusetts .....	971,390	Middlesex	3,401	Nantucket	247,002
Michigan .....	2,015,623	Wayne	2,543	Oscoda	24,883
Minnesota .....	568,899	Hennepin	3,030	Cook	17,865
Mississippi .....	107,273	Hinds	6,155	Stone	21,958
Missouri .....	274,230	St. Louis	6,226	Carter	15,958
Montana .....	53,207	Silver Bow	1,083	Petroleum	6,934
Nebraska .....	247,562	Douglas	1,045	Arthur	9,869
Nevada .....	32,476	Washoe	1,216	Storey	3,606
New Hampshire .....	144,888	Hillsborough	15,589	Carroll	41,413
New Jersey .....	837,340	Essex	28,919	Cape May	124,066
New Mexico .....	69,391	Bernalillo	3,725	De Baca	14,549
New York .....	798,377	Erie	4,188	Hamilton	54,006
North Carolina .....	153,916	Guilford	5,440	Camden	26,156
North Dakota .....	53,849	Cass	2,531	Billings	9,611
Ohio .....	1,217,250	Cuyahoga	11,573	Vinton	32,061
Oklahoma .....	244,159	Oklahoma	3,654	Cimarron	21,668
Oregon .....	355,099	Multnomah	2,042	Jefferson	18,463
Pennsylvania .....	1,411,539	Allegheny	5,791	Forest	70,511
Rhode Island .....	—	—	—	—	—
South Carolina .....	136,580	Greenville	10,367	McCormick	29,866
South Dakota .....	57,697	Minnchaha	1,853	Buffalo	8,046
Tennessee .....	358,250	Shelby	4,090	Van Buren	19,718
Texas .....	528,961	Harris	285	Loving	12,804
Utah .....	211,623	Salt Lake	564	Daggett	8,714
Vermont .....	52,098	Chittendon	3,802	Grand Isle	23,303
Virginia .....	61,697	Pittsylvania	3,769	Craig	15,708
Washington .....	504,980	King	3,157	San Juan	19,275
West Virginia .....	195,619	Kanawha	6,475	Wirt	22,270
Wisconsin .....	766,855	Milwaukee	4,177	Florence	26,197
Wyoming .....	33,651	Laramie	2,543	Teton	8,013

Largest County Population: 4,063,342, Cook, Illinois

Smallest County Population: 285, Loving, Texas

Average County Population: 42,515

TABLE 9. COUNTY POPULATIONS, BY STATES AND GROUPS ACCORDING TO SIZE  
(Only counties classed as separate units are included)

	Under 2,000	2,000 to 4,999	5,000 to 9,999	10,000 to 14,999	15,000 to 19,999	20,000 to 24,999	25,000 to 34,999	35,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 199,999	200,000 to 499,999	500,000 and over
Alabama .....	—	—	—	2	7	8	26	14	7	2	1	—
Arizona .....	—	—	3	1	2	2	4	—	1	1	—	—
Arkansas .....	—	—	5	15	16	8	17	9	4	1	—	—
California .....	1	4	7	7	3	1	7	6	7	11	1	2
Colorado .....	8	12	16	8	7	2	4	2	3	—	—	—
Connecticut .....	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	3	1	3	—
Delaware .....	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—
Florida .....	—	7	18	13	9	3	6	2	6	1	2	—
Georgia .....	—	7	48	38	21	17	19	2	5	1	1	—
Idaho .....	3	9	16	5	3	3	2	2	1	—	—	—
Illinois .....	—	—	9	16	16	11	15	13	11	10	—	1
Indiana .....	—	1	5	13	23	12	18	7	8	3	2	—
Iowa .....	—	—	—	25	34	16	10	7	5	2	—	—
Kansas .....	3	15	26	21	14	9	9	4	2	2	—	—
Kentucky .....	—	2	19	33	29	7	12	10	7	—	1	—
Louisiana .....	—	—	3	9	15	8	12	9	6	1	—	—
Maine .....	—	—	—	—	4	1	2	3	5	1	—	—
Maryland .....	—	—	—	4	4	3	3	2	6	1	—	—
Massachusetts .....	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	2	1	2	4	2
Michigan .....	—	6	15	8	6	7	16	7	10	4	3	1
Minnesota .....	—	1	7	19	22	12	15	6	2	—	2	1
Mississippi .....	—	—	5	9	17	19	15	10	6	1	—	—
Missouri .....	—	—	13	43	20	12	17	4	3	—	2	—
Montana .....	3	17	18	11	1	2	1	2	1	—	—	—
Nebraska .....	9	10	30	22	10	6	4	—	—	1	1	—
Nevada .....	4	8	1	2	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
New Hampshire .....	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	3	2	1	—	—
New Jersey .....	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3	5	4	5	2
New Mexico .....	—	4	5	7	4	6	4	—	1	—	—	—
New York .....	—	1	—	1	2	2	7	14	15	8	5	2
North Carolina .....	—	—	10	11	14	12	14	16	18	5	—	—
North Dakota .....	—	7	21	11	6	5	2	—	1	—	—	—
Ohio .....	—	—	—	3	8	15	21	14	16	3	6	2
Oklahoma .....	—	1	4	14	14	13	10	14	5	1	1	—
Oregon .....	—	6	5	4	7	2	5	3	3	—	1	—
Pennsylvania .....	—	—	4	1	4	3	5	8	18	11	11	1
Rhode Island .....	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Carolina .....	—	—	—	3	6	5	13	9	6	4	—	—
South Dakota .....	3	10	30	11	7	1	1	—	1	—	—	—
Tennessee .....	—	2	11	17	20	10	24	4	3	2	2	—
Texas .....	14	31	46	47	28	25	24	16	14	5	3	1
Utah .....	1	7	12	1	4	—	1	—	2	—	1	—
Vermont .....	—	1	1	1	2	3	2	3	1	—	—	—
Virginia .....	—	5	27	17	11	13	16	8	3	—	—	—
Washington .....	—	5	8	5	2	3	3	6	4	2	—	1
West Virginia .....	—	—	4	10	9	9	7	4	11	1	—	—
Wisconsin .....	—	1	4	7	13	10	12	9	13	1	—	1
Wyoming .....	—	5	7	6	3	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Dist. of Col. ....	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL .....	49	186	464	501	449	308	413	257	253	95	58	17

## THE UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

TABLE 10. LARGEST, SMALLEST, AVERAGE, AND MEDIAN POPULATIONS OF INCORPORATED PLACES IN THE 48 STATES

	—Largest Population—		—Smallest Population—		Average Population	Median Population
Alabama .....	267,583	Birmingham	129	Mooresville	3,839	874
Arizona .....	65,414	Phoenix	524	Winkelman	5,766	2,280
Arkansas .....	88,039	Little Rock	100	Franklin	1,631	485
California .....	1,504,277	Los Angeles	94	Trinidad	17,678	3,540
Colorado .....	322,412	Denver	2	Ophir	2,967	531
Connecticut .....	166,267	Hartford	564	Bantom	28,079	11,763
Delaware .....	112,504	Wilmington	46	Slaughter B.	3,255	587
Florida .....	173,065	Jacksonville	27	Palm B. Harbor	4,281	862
Georgia .....	302,288	Atlanta	24	Gill	2,908	624
Idaho .....	26,130	Boise City	21	Pearl	1,695	527
Illinois .....	3,396,808	Chicago	33	Central City	5,689	676
Indiana .....	386,972	Indianapolis	17	Aladdin	4,123	735
Iowa .....	159,819	Des Moines	27	Asbury	1,672	442
Kansas .....	121,458	Kansas City	64	Wellsford	1,782	440
Kentucky .....	319,077	Louisville	67	Caseyville	3,763	973
Louisiana .....	494,537	New Orleans	314	Converse	5,813	1,244
Maine .....	73,643	Portland	2,581 *	Madison *	32,586 *	8,067 *
Maryland .....	859,100	Baltimore	2	Eagle Harbor	8,148	802
Massachusetts ....	770,816	Boston	13,916	Newburyport	74,778	41,824
Michigan .....	1,623,452	Detroit	37	Lake Ann	7,907	1,017
Minnesota .....	492,370	Minneapolis	10	Mesabi	2,366	450
Mississippi .....	62,107	Jackson	121	Enid	2,210	704
Missouri .....	816,048	St. Louis	25	Gifford	2,954	393
Montana .....	37,081	Butte	140	Broadview	2,480	783
Nebraska .....	223,844	Omaha	23	Gross	1,480	389
Nevada .....	21,317	Reno	830	Wells	4,507	2,481
New Hampshire ..	77,685	Manchester	6,138	Somersworth	21,717	14,821
New Jersey .....	429,760	Newark	4	S. Cape May	10,156	2,451
New Mexico .....	35,449	Albuquerque	143	Grenville	3,366	1,314
New York .....	7,454,995	New York City	22	Saltaire	18,877	1,290
North Carolina ...	100,899	Charlotte	8 *	Dellview *	3,330 *	925 *
North Dakota ....	32,580	Fargo	19	Waburn	840	312
Ohio .....	878,336	Cleveland	42	Chippewa on the Lake	5,776	735
Oklahoma .....	204,424	Oklahoma City	7	Markham	2,236	520
Oregon .....	305,394	Portland	43	Florence	3,262	593
Pennsylvania .....	1,931,334	Philadelphia	42	Mt. Gretna	7,028	1,427
Rhode Island ....	253,504	Providence	25,248	Central Falls	72,886	47,085
South Carolina ...	71,275	Charleston	73	Summit	2,439	606
South Dakota ....	40,832	Sioux Falls	42	Carter	995	390
Tennessee .....	292,942	Memphis	81	Denmark	5,643	919
Texas .....	384,515	Houston	94	Belcherville	5,161	1,279
Utah .....	149,934	Salt Lake City	63	Kingston	2,122	621
Vermont .....	27,686	Burlington	68	West Glover	2,319	740
Virginia .....	193,042	Richmond	83	Duffield	4,863	836
Washington .....	368,302	Seattle	43	Hatton	4,792	686
West Virginia ....	78,836	Huntington	113	Brandonville	3,366	1,056
Wisconsin .....	587,472	Milwaukee	66	Lac La Belle	3,872	725
Wyoming .....	22,474	Cheyenne	38	Lost Spring	1,691	420

\* Data as to Maine and North Carolina uncertain. For Maine the 1940 census does not report the populations of incorporated places under 2,500.

*Largest Population:* 7,454,995, New York City

*Smallest Population:* 2, Eagle Harbor, Maryland, and others reported by the Census Bureau but probably not active

*Average Population:* 4,972

ages, the regional distribution of county populations conforms to expectations. The smallest average populations are in the Mountain and Great Plains states, the largest in New England and the Middle Atlantic region. The average county in Nevada has 6,485 inhabitants, and the average in Massachusetts 308,737. The counties of Alabama come closest to the average for the whole country.

Something might be said about the relative importance of the functions of counties in different sections of the country, but this would only be to repeat the words of more authoritative writers. Enough has been said to show that there are counties and counties, and that what is true of one need not be true of another.

#### INCORPORATED PLACES

Third in total numbers among all local units are the urban and partly-urban incorporations variously known as cities, villages, boroughs, and incorporated towns. The last are not to be confused with the towns and townships described in a separate section. The characteristics of incorporated places in general, and the terms used to describe them, have already been briefly discussed.

It is our estimate that the 16,262 incorporated places enumerated herein cover not more than 2 or 3 per cent of the national land area, but include over 61.6 per cent of the population. The largest land area among incorporated places is probably that of Los Angeles, with 365.9 square miles, while that of New York is 299, and Chicago 192.7. Many small incorporated places are less than one square mile in area.

The largest in population of incorporated places is, of course, New York, with 7,454,995 in 1940. The smallest reported in the 1940 census were Eagle Harbor, Maryland, and Ophir, Colorado, with two inhabitants each. If these populations are correct these and other similarly small units are probably inoperative.

The smallest incorporated place that actually carries on a government is not known. Many are reported with fewer than 25 inhabitants. (See Table 10.)

Because of their attachment to the town form of local government, some of the New England states have put restrictions on the incorporation of cities and villages. As a result, they have relatively few incorporated places, although two of these states, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, lead the nation in percentage of urban population, 91.6 and 89.4 per cent respectively, as defined by the Bureau of the Census.<sup>2</sup> The few incorporated

places that they have are correspondingly populous. The average in Rhode Island is 72,886 inhabitants, in Massachusetts, 74,778—the largest averages in the United States. Two other New England states also have a high average population for incorporated places,—Connecticut, 28,079, and New Hampshire, 21,717.

*Variations in Population.* Of the states without such restrictions on incorporations, New York has the largest average population of incorporated places, 18,877. North Dakota has the smallest, 840, and South Dakota is next with 995. The other averages range from 1,480 in Nebraska to 17,678 in California. The national average is 4,972.

Average population is naturally a misleading figure. A few very large places bring the average up very high. The median figures are more useful for presenting a true picture. The median in any series is the middle one in the group; half the cases fall above it, half below it. Thus, in North Dakota, the median population of incorporated places was 312 in 1940. This means that half of its 332 incorporated places had populations under that figure and half above it. In fact, more than two-thirds of them had fewer than 500 inhabitants. Seven Middle Western states had median populations of incorporated places of under 500, and the same was true of Arkansas and Wyoming. In New York the median was 1,290 and in Pennsylvania 1,427. These states also have many incorporated places of very small population. (See Tables 10 and 11.)

It is interesting to notice that in the very areas where townships and school districts are also numerous, there is the largest number of incorporated places. Illinois has the largest number, 1,138; Pennsylvania is next with 987; Iowa has 933; Ohio 884; Missouri 792; and Minnesota 751. The strong spirit of local self-government, the demand for modern municipal services, the financial ability to provide them, and probably other factors have contributed to this result. In the South and in the Mountain states, as in New England, there are relatively fewer incorporated places as well as fewer other units.

While the number of small incorporated places is great, the percentage of the total population residing in them is relatively small.

<sup>2</sup> In general the Bureau of the Census counts as "urban" the populations of all incorporated places of 2,500 or more inhabitants. In addition in the 1940 census it classed as urban certain townships of 10,000 and more population and sufficient density, and also all towns in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island that contained village settlements of 2,500 or more population. All other population is classed as "rural."



# Comparison of POPULATIONS of Largest, Average, and Smallest STATES, COUNTIES, and INCORPORATED PLACES

1941

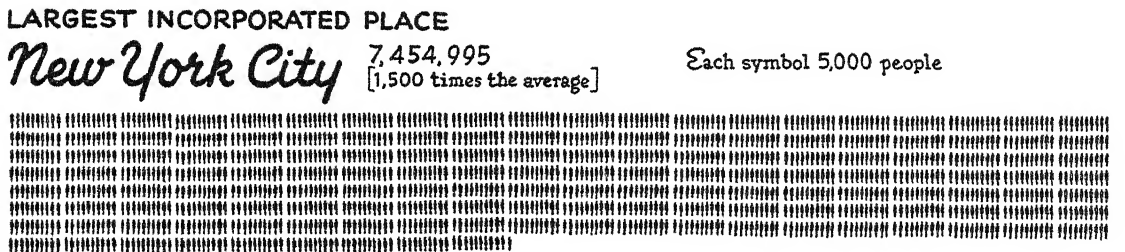
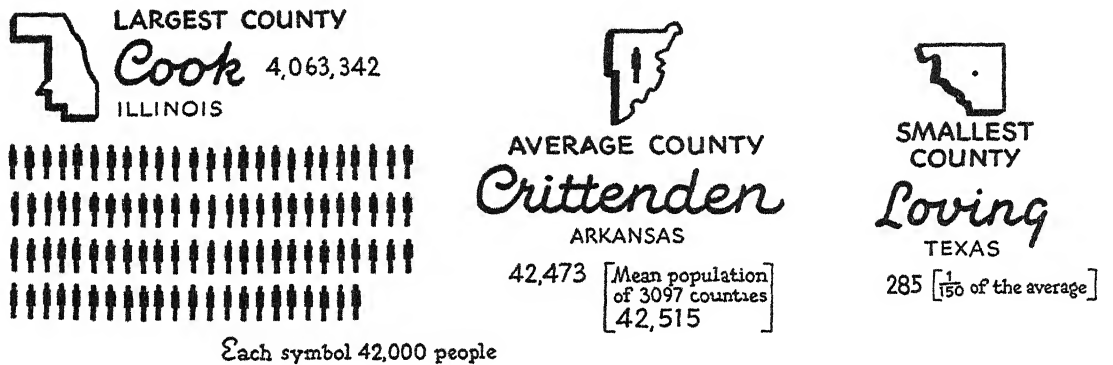
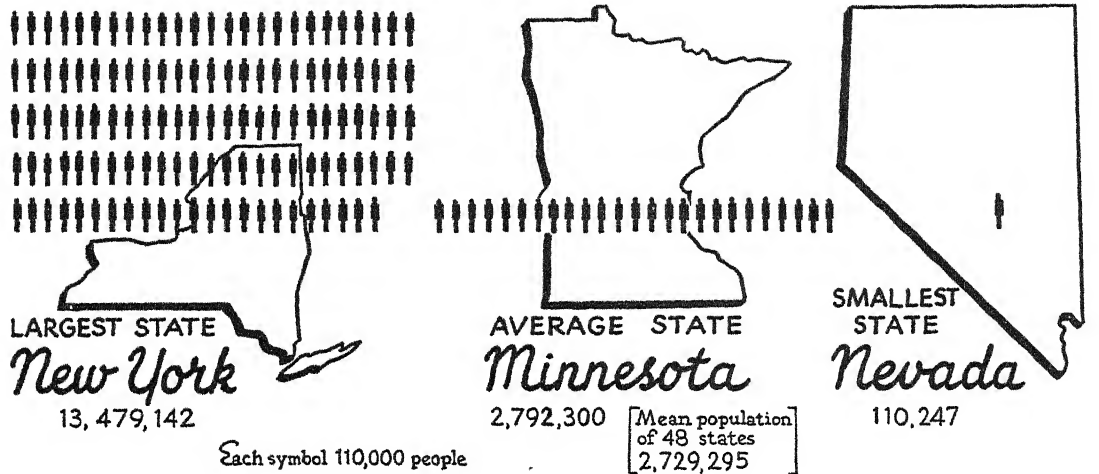


Figure 5



# PROPORTION of Units of Local Government to AREA and POPULATION — by States

1941

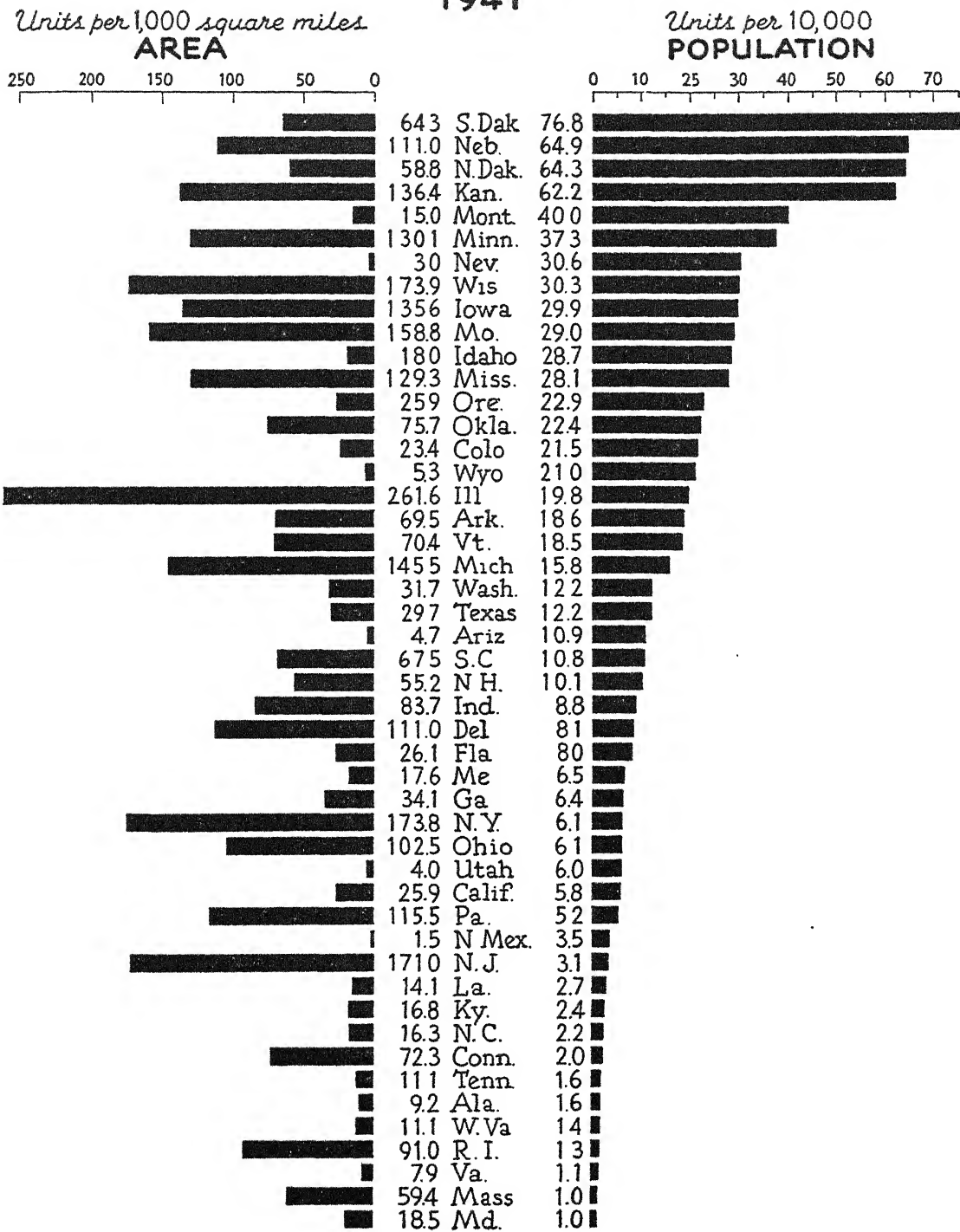


Figure 6

## THE UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

TABLE 11. NUMBER OF INCORPORATED PLACES, GROUPED ACCORDING TO POPULATION AND BY STATES

	Under 100	100- 499	500- 999	1,000- 2,499	2,500- 4,999	5,000- 9,999	10,000- 19,999	20,000- 29,999	30,000- 49,999	50,000- 99,999	100,000- 199,999	200,000- 299,999	300,000- 499,999	500,000- 999,999	1,000,000 and over
Alabama .....	—	77	69	63	29	16	7	3	1	2	—	1	—	—	—
Arizona .....	—	—	7	10	6	8	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Arkansas .....	—	199	77	58	31	13	4	3	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
California .....	1	13	23	81	56	51	31	7	8	7	2	1	1	1	1
Colorado .....	19	100	52	44	13	9	5	—	1	1	—	—	1	—	—
Connecticut .....	—	—	3	7	4	4	6	4	5	2	3	—	—	—	—
Delaware .....	1	22	11	10	6	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Florida .....	16	81	57	57	35	15	10	3	3	1	3	—	—	—	—
Georgia .....	9	173	107	93	39	19	11	3	—	4	—	—	1	—	—
Idaho .....	3	65	32	25	16	3	6	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Illinois .....	16	420	276	218	89	60	31	8	11	7	1	—	—	—	1
Indiana .....	16	181	137	104	31	32	15	7	5	4	3	—	1	—	—
Iowa .....	39	467	211	127	45	23	9	4	3	4	1	—	—	—	—
Kansas .....	6	316	124	78	32	12	15	1	1	1	2	—	—	—	—
Kentucky .....	2	68	73	82	26	17	6	1	4	1	—	—	1	—	—
Louisiana .....	—	38	42	58	26	18	4	3	1	1	—	—	1	—	—
Maine* .....	—	—	—	—	6	10	7	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Maryland .....	5	45	39	29	12	3	4	—	2	—	—	—	—	1	—
Massachusetts .....	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	9	10	8	7	—	—	1	—
Michigan .....	4	123	106	118	47	35	24	3	7	6	2	—	—	—	1
Minnesota .....	21	385	148	119	34	29	9	3	—	—	1	1	1	—	—
Mississippi .....	—	94	72	57	25	11	6	4	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Missouri .....	54	415	124	113	41	24	13	3	2	2	—	—	1	1	—
Montana .....	—	34	33	25	11	6	3	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nebraska .....	20	303	102	69	19	8	7	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Nevada .....	—	—	3	4	2	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
New Hampshire .....	—	—	—	—	—	2	6	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
New Jersey .....	9	29	54	75	56	53	27	6	9	7	4	—	2	—	—
New Mexico .....	—	13	15	13	8	9	3	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
New York .....	9	109	143	148	84	48	36	12	9	6	3	1	1	1	1
North Carolina .....	—	94	103	96	31	19	16	2	3	4	1	—	—	—	—
North Dakota .....	19	206	59	36	2	6	2	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ohio .....	10	320	199	169	70	57	23	12	12	4	2	3	2	1	—
Oklahoma .....	14	234	108	88	31	22	16	2	1	—	1	1	—	—	—
Oregon .....	9	78	42	32	18	9	4	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Pennsylvania .....	7	212	194	230	140	112	56	16	5	10	3	—	—	1	1
Rhode Island .....	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3	1	—	1	—	—	—
South Carolina .....	1	107	37	52	27	14	6	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	—
South Dakota .....	14	169	63	37	9	4	5	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tennessee .....	1	51	47	48	30	15	6	2	—	—	3	1	—	—	—
Texas .....	1	117	144	196	94	58	25	4	4	7	1	2	1	—	—
Utah .....	5	80	51	38	16	5	2	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Vermont .....	1	24	16	20	4	7	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Virginia .....	1	65	48	42	24	13	6	—	5	2	2	—	—	—	—
Washington .....	3	74	59	45	20	6	8	2	1	—	2	—	1	—	—
West Virginia .....	—	44	51	64	20	13	5	2	2	3	—	—	—	—	—
Wisconsin .....	1	189	135	95	41	19	15	7	8	2	—	—	—	1	—
Wyoming .....	4	41	9	18	6	2	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL .....	341	5,875	3,505	3,191	1,412	922	509	149	139	105	49	13	16	8	5

\* The 1940 census does not report separately the populations of the 22 incorporated places in Maine of under 2,500. It should be noted also that the District of Columbia is not included in this table.

## TOWNS AND TOWNSHIPS

This section deals with two somewhat different types of local units, namely the towns of New England and the organized civil towns or townships found in the states from New York and New Jersey west to the Dakotas and southwest as far as Kansas, as well as in two counties in Washington. These two species of units are alike in the following respects:

1. They usually cover nearly all of the state or county, instead of being scattered and non-contiguous like incorporated places.
2. The great majority of them are primarily rural although in Rhode Island and in large parts of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire most towns have an urban or semi-urban nucleus which elsewhere would usually be separately incorporated as a city or village.
3. They provide the local services needed in rural areas, and are to some extent also agents of the state for state purposes such as health administration, police, and minor courts.
4. The town-meeting form of government prevails generally in both towns and townships.
5. Both types exist as a rule under general state laws and do not have special charters.

*Differences in New England Towns.* New England towns and the civil towns or townships of other states differ in the following respects:

1. The towns, especially in the more densely inhabited parts of New England are, on the average, much more populous and more urban than civil towns or townships elsewhere. In other parts of the country, urban and semi-urban communities, even of very small size, are separately incorporated as cities or villages, but in the New England states they are generally not separated from the town. The Massachusetts constitution forbids the incorporation as a city of any place having less than 12,000 population. In Rhode Island there is no chartered municipality of less than 23,000, and in New Hampshire there is none of less than 5,000. In these states all communities of smaller populations are classed as towns. Naturally they have come to perform many urban governmental functions.

2. Because of the very limited importance of county governments in New England, towns must perform services elsewhere rendered by counties. As a result, the town is a much more important and vital factor in the system of local government in the New England states than the township is elsewhere. Its functions as an agent

of the state are more extensive and varied than those of the Midwestern township.

3. In most of Ohio and from there west and south the township is usually based upon, and in area is generally identical with, the congressional or survey township. This is an area six miles square, containing 36 sections or square miles of land. Areas so arbitrarily drawn will not, of course, conform to the natural social groupings of the inhabitants except by accident.

*Towns and Townships Numerous.* According to our enumeration, towns and townships rank next to school districts in total numbers. There are 18,998 towns and townships in the United States, not including those small semi-urban incorporated places, usually called villages, which in some states are called towns.<sup>3</sup> The largest number in any state is 1,883 (Minnesota), the smallest is 32 (Rhode Island). Each of the New England states has less than 500 towns, and those Middle Western states that are fully organized into townships generally have more than 1,000 townships each.

The towns and townships, plus the cities and villages, tend to cover the areas of the states in which they are found, but even in New England they fall short of doing so. A large area in northern Maine is unorganized, as are some parts of northern Minnesota. In the more sparsely populated regions in North and South Dakota and Kansas, many townships reported in the census are probably also without governmental organization. In Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, and Washington, township organization is optional with the counties. As a result, 85 counties of 102 in Illinois, 24 of 114 in Missouri, 27 of 93 in Nebraska, and only 2 of 39 in Washington have organized townships. The edges of the national map of townships are, therefore, somewhat frayed out toward the south, west, and north. Town and township organization is localized mainly in the northeastern quarter of the United States and has generally not penetrated the South and the far West.

*Sizes of Towns.* In the land-survey states, most townships began with 36 square miles of area. As villages and cities were incorporated and separated from the townships, the average areas and populations of the townships tended to decrease.

<sup>3</sup> The "towns" of Oklahoma, for example, have been considered to be incorporated places like villages. In Maine there are 64 "plantations" which are here included with the 416 towns, making the total 480 for that state. Some of the larger and more populous towns in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island are treated by the Bureau of the Census as urban. Whatever their size, we group them all with townships.

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In Minnesota, the average area is about 34 square miles. The areas of New England towns tend to be considerably smaller.

In population the towns and townships of the New England and Middle Atlantic states are distinctly ahead of townships elsewhere. Massachusetts has one town of almost 50,000 inhabitants, but Pennsylvania can match with a township, and New York goes both one better with a township of over 80,000. (See Table 12.) These equal or exceed the average county population in the United States, and are far ahead of the average county in most of the agricultural states. On the other hand, 534 townships and towns have less than one hundred inhabitants.

The median population figures shown in Table 12 (last column) suggest the wide differences in town and township populations throughout the United States. What the trans-Mississippi states lack in median or average populations per township they make up in the numbers of these units. (See Tables 12 and 13.) Whoever speaks of towns or townships in the United States needs to bear well in mind the tremendous differences between these units within any state and also as between states.

#### SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The autonomous school district, organized separately from the ordinary system of local administration, is a common American device. England had some such units at one time, and there are examples in Canada and elsewhere, but it is primarily in the United States that the district system is now to be found. Nowhere else is it so extensive or so deeply entrenched.

Frequently the term "district system" is used to refer only to an arrangement by which areas for school administration are distinct from and usually smaller than the counties, towns, and other local units, and have received from the state a separate corporate status and political organization. In a broader sense of the term, however, any arrangement would be included in which the school board or other authority is distinct from the other local authorities and is autonomous in school affairs. The area over which such a board presides may or may not be identical with the county, city, village, or town.

As in the case of other units, a distinction must be made between the *areas* in and for which there is organized administration of schools, and the school administrative *units* which can be correctly counted as separate units of government. The number of the latter is smaller.

School administration is provided in and for an uncounted number of distinct local *areas* in the United States, probably about 123,000 in all. Of this number 118,308 may be counted as distinct units of local government. In the other areas, school administration is provided by some joint government serving both school and civil or municipal purposes. For example, in Massachusetts the towns are both school and civil units under one government, that of the town meeting. Each town is a distinct *area* for school administration and must be so counted, but it is incorrect to count each town twice, as if it were two units of government.

There are 11 states in which the county is the principal school unit, 10 states in which towns and townships fulfill this role, and 27 that use the small district system,<sup>4</sup> from the city down to the small rural school district. The first 11 states have 3,048 separate school districts that are counted herein as distinct units of government, or 2.5 per cent of all school units. The same states have 24,132,114 inhabitants or 18.4 per cent of the population of the whole country.

The 10 states that use cities and towns or townships as their principal school areas have 4,817 separate school units, or 4 per cent of the national total, but the same states have 27,827,405 inhabitants, or 21.2 per cent of the nation's population.

The remaining 27 states, which use the separate district system, have a total of 110,443 units of school government, or 93.3 per cent of all such units enumerated herein, to serve 60.3 per cent of the population. The contrast is a very striking one. It is the states that have the separate district systems that pile up the tremendous totals of school districts.

*Extremes of Population.* Figures on the areas and populations of school units are difficult to obtain, particularly for the district-system states. We know, however, that there are tremendous variations in population. The New York City school unit provides public education for a population of 7½ million, that of Chicago for a population of nearly 3½ million. On the other hand, there are thousands of school districts, with separate boards and corporate authority, that provide schools for less than a dozen children each during the year. Some of these petty districts cover but a few square miles of area and include only a few families. Their capacity to provide educational services, never large, has in many instances been

<sup>4</sup> W. S. Deffenbaugh, and Timon Covert, *School Administrative Units* (Washington: Office of Education, 1933), Pamphlet no. 34.

reduced in recent years to almost nothing. Increased state aid, consolidation, and other centralizing tendencies have become almost inevitable in many places.

The geographical distribution of school districts follows a fairly regular pattern. The county-unit states stretch from Virginia to Florida and into the South Central region as far as Tennessee and Kentucky. New Mexico and Utah also have the county unit. The town-unit system exists in the New England states, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Indiana. From New York west one finds mainly the district system, and the correspondingly large numbers of units. Illinois leads the list with 12,129 districts, Missouri follows with 8,652, and seven other states have more than 6,000 districts each.

#### OTHER SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Some years ago Professor F. H. Guild made a plea for the "independent recognition" of "special municipal corporations" in the American system of local government.<sup>5</sup> He pointed out how these units frequently satisfy a need that no other unit can. In some cases, an established unit is unwilling to give a service desired in only a part of its

<sup>5</sup> "Special Municipal Corporations," 18 *National Municipal Review*, 319-323, May, 1929.

area; in other cases, the area of the existing units is too small, or in some other way unsuitable, since drainage, irrigation, and similar services need to be unified over some natural region like a drainage basin; and in still other cases, the constitutional debt or tax limits imposed on existing units prevent them from rendering a new service. In such cases, he says, it is "far easier to leave the old forms intact and to superimpose new forms" although this "may eventually lead to chaos."

England has had a long experience with these special districts, and still has some of them to deal with, but it never saw them flourish in the profusion found in the United States. School districts, which are discussed in the preceding section, are, of course, the most numerous with us. They account for two-thirds of all the local units in the land. All other types of local special units number 8,382, according to our enumeration. Table 14 shows the number in each state.

The enumeration of these special districts (other than school) herein presented is no doubt open to many criticisms. The truth is that no one really knows in any state how many of these special units there are; but on the whole it is felt that the total figure given is a fair approximation. We endeavored to exclude from the computation all "areas" and "districts," of which there are many

TABLE 12. LARGEST, SMALLEST, AVERAGE, AND MEDIAN POPULATIONS OF TOWNS AND TOWNSHIPS IN THE 22 STATES HAVING SUCH UNITS \*

	—Largest Population—		—Smallest Population—		Average Population	Median Population
Connecticut .....	61,215	Stamford	234	Union	5,311	2,260
Illinois .....	105,087	Peoria City Twp.	215	Council Hill Twp.	2,876	1,031
Indiana .....	314,505	Center	170	Marion	3,364	1,201
Iowa .....	66,039	Davenport City Twp.	233	Hancock	791	730
Kansas .....	12,871	Mission	10	Jones	608	431
Maine .....	14,886	Sanford	9	Perkins Plantation *	1,097	677
Massachusetts .....	49,786	Brookline	57	Mt. Washington	4,472	2,327
Michigan .....	24,958	Royal Oak	10	Maple Grove	1,454	928
Minnesota .....	6,466	Minnetonka	21	Warren	540	491
Missouri .....	13,241	Independence	145	Smith	1,288	815
Nebraska .....	2,706	Wymore	56	Josie	553	462
New Hampshire ..	12,144	Claremont	13	Dixville	1,127	738
New Jersey .....	39,714	North Bergen	72	Pahaquarry	3,623	1,805
New York .....	259,318	Hempstead	89	Benson	3,403	1,645
North Dakota ....	2,433	Hamer Twp.	12	Sunshine	202	179
Ohio .....	306,087	Montgomery	24	Chagrin Falls	2,936	1,336
Pennsylvania .....	56,883	Upper Darby	26	Barclay	1,896	1,221
Rhode Island ....	32,165	East Providence	526	W. Greenwich	6,347	4,400
South Dakota ....	2,278	Utica	7	Cedar *	237	196
Vermont .....	11,257	Bennington	12	Averill	1,163	754
Washington .....	7,817	Opportunity	129	Blanchard and Pioneer	840	412
Wisconsin .....	14,611	Wauwatosa	80	Cedar Rapids	901	785

\* This table is based upon census reports. Actually, some of the largest places reported, as in Indiana and Ohio, are not separate township governments but parts of large cities that are at the same time included in civil districts called townships. Thus the population comparisons are in several cases not strictly correct. The townships of smallest population, such as Perkins Plantation, Maine, and Cedar Township, South Dakota, may not be functioning units.



TABLE 13. NUMBER OF TOWNS AND TOWNSHIPS, ARRANGED BY STATES AND GROUPED ACCORDING TO POPULATION

	Under 100	100-199	200-399	400-599	600-799	800-999	1,000-1,999	2,000-2,999	3,000-4,999	5,000-9,999	10,000-14,999	15,000-19,999	20,000-24,999	25,000-34,999	35,000-49,999	50,000 and over
Connecticut . . . .	—	—	3	12	12	5	36	22	19	27	5	2	4	4	1	2
Illinois . . . . .	—	—	53	173	276	199	420	102	81	60	23	11	9	11	7	11
Indiana . . . . .	—	2	27	58	150	142	395	91	53	48	19	7	4	6	6	8
Iowa . . . . .	—	—	67	461	380	207	386	59	20	18	5	—	—	3	2	1
Kansas . . . . .	22	185	493	329	200	131	156	18	7	8	1	—	—	—	—	—
Maine . . . . .	19	54	70	69	66	40	96	27	24	13	2	—	—	—	—	—
Massachusetts . . .	2	6	23	17	12	11	62	50	43	47	20	12	3	1	3	—
Michigan . . . . .	21	36	138	146	154	188	396	80	61	33	6	2	5	—	—	—
Minnesota . . . . .	32	161	453	634	375	124	87	11	4	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Missouri . . . . .	—	1	22	77	68	59	70	19	18	10	1	—	—	—	—	—
Nebraska . . . . .	3	26	149	147	65	31	52	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
New Hampshire . .	7	12	36	36	34	20	46	18	10	4	1	—	—	—	—	—
New Jersey . . . .	1	—	3	15	16	10	80	37	32	20	10	4	2	4	1	—
New York . . . . .	2	8	24	56	82	65	311	135	125	76	24	6	6	5	3	4
North Dakota . .	152	697	489	54	8	2	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ohio . . . . .	1	—	4	87	162	185	498	151	106	86	24	10	11	11	3	2
Pennsylvania . . .	11	27	96	181	179	185	489	174	137	73	12	8	2	1	1	1
Rhode Island . . .	—	—	—	1	—	1	7	2	7	6	6	1	—	1	—	—
South Dakota . .	253	319	376	148	23	3	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Vermont . . . . .	8	12	40	39	27	24	57	13	13	3	2	—	—	—	—	—
Washington . . . .	—	9	27	11	6	2	9	7	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wisconsin . . . . .	1	46	134	208	273	273	311	20	18	1	4	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL . . . . .	535	1,601	2,727	2,959	2,568	1,907	3,967	1,042	779	536	165	63	46	47	27	29

varieties, that do not conform to the definition of a unit.

It would be futile to try to discuss the relative areas, populations, and activities of the special units enumerated. The facts are simply not available. Some "fire" and "improvement" districts probably do not have a hundred inhabitants or as much as a square mile in area. On the other hand, some special districts probably exceed a thousand square miles in area, and the Chicago Sanitary District serves about four million people.

*Confusing Variety of Types.* Each special district usually begins with only a single or at most a very few functions, and receives a corresponding title. Road, drainage, and irrigation districts are the most common simple titles, but these and others occur also in compound and variegated forms. In a number of states one finds several types of road, drainage, or irrigation districts, often rivaling the school districts in number of types. Thus one state has irrigation, conservancy, drainage, flood control, flood protection, levee, county irrigation, county sanitation, sanitary, county water, metropolitan water, municipal water, storm water, water conservation, and water storage districts, among others. Another state has airport and harbor, harbor and inland waterways, inlet, navigation, port, and harbor districts, all separately authorized. One finds road districts,

good road districts, special road districts, road maintenance districts, road improvement districts, and road improvement districts alternative plan, as well as many others. One state has both mosquito control and anti-mosquito districts; other states provide for mosquito abatement districts.

But small beginnings and restrictive titles apparently do not prevent great expansions of functions in some cases. Port districts, for example, engage in a great variety of activities. In some places they own and operate extensive warehouses, cold storage plants, docks, and other facilities. Drainage and irrigation districts in some cases engage in the development of electric power. The directors of a "mosquito abatement district," having completed their work of abatement by intensive drainage of the land, recently discussed comprehensive plans for restoring the streams and ponds and for establishing extensive parks and a wildlife sanctuary.

*Rise and Fall of Districts.* The more common tendency among special units is not to expand functions and to increase in importance, but to initiate or perhaps to complete a small project and then to disappear. The roads that are built by special units are absorbed into the county or state system. Failure comes to the irrigation or drainage project, revenues cease to come in, and the trustees

TABLE 14. NUMBER OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS, OTHER THAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS, BY TYPES AND STATES, JANUARY, 1941

	1930-33 Total	1941 Total	Water Control	Irrig. and Conserv.	Rural Road and Bridge	Urban Improve- ment	Urban Utility	Hous- ing	Soil Con- serv.	Misc.
Alabama .....	—	23	1	—	—	3	—	10	9	—
Arizona .....	69	83	5	72	3	—	2	—	—	1
Arkansas .....	834	236	158	—	36	—	1	36	—	5
California .....	265	863	313	110	13	3	169	26	2	227
Colorado .....	93	53	30	—	—	—	—	2	17	4
Connecticut .....	111	132	—	—	—	52	67	10	—	3
Delaware .....	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Florida .....	218	265	59	—	136	12	4	12	—	42
Georgia .....	—	132	—	—	—	—	—	132	—	—
Idaho .....	122	105	—	—	100	—	—	5	—	—
Illinois .....	2,439	824	502	—	179	76	36	19	—	12
Indiana .....	5	205	2	—	—	—	—	26	—	177
Iowa .....	—	75	47	—	—	6	10	—	—	12
Kansas .....	65	313	67	1	—	—	—	—	—	245
Kentucky .....	14	23	14	—	—	—	—	9	—	—
Louisiana .....	161	327	311	—	—	—	—	16	—	—
Maine .....	—	2	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Maryland .....	1	19	—	—	—	2	—	5	—	12
Massachusetts .....	63	106	3	—	—	1	90	8	—	4
Michigan .....	13	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Minnesota .....	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Mississippi .....	708	676	181	—	478	—	—	14	—	3
Missouri .....	1,183	1,088	307	—	743	24	12	2	—	—
Montana .....	58	158	28	63	—	—	—	5	3	59
Nebraska .....	103	217	79	89	—	—	1	1	—	47
Nevada .....	19	26	1	5	—	—	6	—	7	7
New Hampshire ...	—	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8
New Jersey .....	17	153	—	—	—	—	118	29	4	2
New Mexico .....	14	14	10	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
New York .....	96	296	—	—	—	—	—	11	—	285 <sup>a</sup>
North Carolina ....	139	160	147	—	—	—	—	12	—	1
North Dakota .....	37	56	3	12	—	41	—	—	—	—
Ohio .....	105	230	7	—	—	4	—	15	—	204
Oklahoma .....	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oregon .....	131	231	55	53	—	—	72	1	—	50
Pennsylvania .....	373	21	—	—	—	—	—	21	—	—
Rhode Island .....	54	57	—	—	—	—	52	5	—	—
South Carolina .....	10	27	—	—	—	—	—	27	—	—
South Dakota .....	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tennessee .....	208	9	—	—	—	—	—	9	—	—
Texas .....	271	341	155	101	—	—	—	29	46	10
Utah .....	55	85	22	30	—	—	14	—	19	—
Vermont .....	25	48	—	—	—	—	47	1	—	—
Virginia .....	2	10	—	—	—	—	—	10	—	—
Washington .....	351	380	142	146	—	1	—	6	—	85
West Virginia .....	—	9	—	—	—	—	—	9	—	—
Wisconsin .....	110	247	245	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
Wyoming .....	33	43	17	26	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL .....	8,580	8,382	2,911	712	1,688	227	702	525	107	1,510

<sup>a</sup> The New York State Tax Commission reports about 2,600 town special districts for that state as of 1939. Since the adoption of the new Town Law of 1934, however, the separate boards of commissioners governing most of these districts have been abolished, and the districts are now governed by the town boards. Of the remainder, only the fire districts have generally retained separate boards of commissioners and enough fiscal autonomy to be considered as units of government. It has been impossible to determine the number of such districts now in operation. The figure given in this table is a rough estimate.

drop the work in despair. Every newly developed region has or has had this experience. A boom in agriculture followed by collapse leaves behind it the wreckage of many special road, irrigation, and drainage districts. Particularly in rural areas, the life of special districts is uncertain and is likely to be short.

The geographical distribution of special districts, taken as a whole, is uneven and difficult to describe. Missouri, California, Illinois, and Mississippi have the largest numbers. These four states have 41 per cent of all such units reported, but adjoining states such as Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Tennessee report few or none. States as far apart as Louisiana, Washington, Texas, Florida,

and Kansas also have relatively large numbers. They account for another 18 per cent of the total. This leaves 39 states with about 40 per cent of all such units, of which 2 seem to have none.

In general, the older states of the Atlantic seaboard and the South have relatively few, whereas the newer states and those of rapid recent growth (California, Florida, Texas, Illinois) seem to have more in proportion to population. It may be that special districts in large numbers are a symptom of newness, and that as a local government system acquires maturity it tends to eliminate most of these supplemental units. The same generalization applies to some extent also to the school district problem.

### Part III: The Adequacy of the Present System of Local Units

Most of this report is devoted to the enumeration and description of local units in the United States. The work was undertaken mainly as a factual and statistical study, but it is only natural that it should close with some more general reflections. Many persons would like to have specific answers to two questions. First, are there not too many units of local government in the United States? Second, are not many of them too small, too inefficient, and too expensive to the taxpayer? Those who ask these questions usually expect an affirmative answer. Each question in a sense includes the other, and we may properly begin the consideration of both by inquiring into what is the most expedient size for a local unit in the United States.

#### INADEQUATE SIZE OF LOCAL UNITS

One of the most abused words in the English language is the little adverb "too." One hears frequently that there is too much government in business, that taxes are too high, that Mr. So-and-So works too hard or drinks too much, that the day is too hot, or the coffee too strong. Obviously every use of this word "too" implies that the user has in mind an agreed standard of what is just right. Just as obviously, there is no such standard in most cases in which the word is used. In fact, in some instances a common standard is clearly impossible, and any asserted standard is a mere matter of opinion. In other cases, the word "too" is used in conjunction with a term which

itself sets an absolute standard; in this event the word "too" becomes an absurdity, as in the statement that a line is too straight, or that a judge is too impartial.

At the present time, when the whole system of local government in the United States is under attack, one of the charges most frequently heard is that there are too many units of local government, that most of them are too small to be efficient, and that in consequence public expenditures are too high and service is too poor. Every such statement implies that there is a certain number of local units that would be just the right number, and that there is an optimum or best size for units. Unfortunately there is no agreement upon this question. Very little has been written about it, and there are great difficulties involved in establishing a norm for either numbers or sizes.

One of the first difficulties arises out of the fact that units of local government are human organizations. One should not expect, therefore, to determine their size with the precision insisted upon by physicists, engineers, and others who have greater control of their material. Obviously the only correct size for a right angle is exactly 90 degrees, and the only correct length for a meter is exactly the length set by international agreement. In our problem we must be satisfied with a much less precise result. The use of the term "optimum" implies, as we use it here, an approximation, indicating what is most suitable in



the circumstances given. The term suggests, in other words, a relative and not an absolute standard.

### THE HISTORICAL EXPLANATION

A historical review of local government units will convincingly show how time and circumstances must be considered when the size of local units is discussed. Time brings social and economic changes of profound importance for local government. In fact the principal argument one now hears against the size of present-day local units is an historical one. American counties, townships, towns, and school districts were laid out many years ago, before the automobile, the telephone, modern improved road systems, and rural free delivery were known. At that time the difficulties of travel and communication were so great that it was economical and convenient to have many small local units, so that everyone could be within easy reach of his county seat, town hall, and schoolhouse. The functions of government were then few and nontechnical, and the expense of maintaining local governments was small. Officers were practically unpaid, and taxes were low.

Now, it is argued, all these conditions of rural life have changed. The horse-and-buggy days are gone. Space has collapsed with the coming of automobiles, good roads, and telephones. The speeds of travel, transportation, and communication have increased tremendously. At the same time local government functions have increased in number, in technical difficulty, and in expensiveness. Full-time, salaried officers are now needed. Since human abilities and wealth are not evenly distributed, many local units are unable to supply the personal talents or the financial resources for supporting necessary functions. Some are being forced into virtual bankruptcy; many are unable to maintain the standards of service demanded in modern times. It is argued, therefore, that only by replacing numerous small units with larger, more capable ones, can we expect to achieve economy, efficiency, and a fair distribution of tax burdens in local government.

This kind of argument has been repeated so many times that one wearies in hearing it again. It contains an undoubted measure of truth, but it also stops short of telling us anything important. It is heard almost as much in certain Southern states, where the township and common school district are unknown, and where the units of local government are relatively few and large, as it is in some Northern states with fully 10 times

as many units for an equal population. The historical argument, in other words, gives no standard by which to judge of the proper number or size of units today.

### SOCIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We turn, then, from the historians to the sociologists, and particularly to those who deal in rural problems. Some of them have developed the conception of a "trade area" surrounding each small city, village, or hamlet; they believe that this area, in which the people have common business, social, and religious relations, constitutes a natural social unit that should also be the unit of local government. The village would thus be reunited with the surrounding rural area and population in one governing unit, called a "rural municipality," and this unit would supply schools, libraries, health and recreational services, police, courts, and other facilities. Dr. Galpin has suggested that if such a community had at least 1,000 families or 5,000 persons, it would be reasonably adequate for the essential local purposes. Its area, in a typical rural section of a Midwestern state, would be from 200 to 400 square miles, or from 5 to 10 townships.

Behind this idea seems to stand another, namely that rural society is being reorganized naturally into such trade areas, that the smaller hamlets are declining and disappearing, while the larger trading centers are growing stronger. In other words, farmers are traveling farther for economic, social, and religious purposes and are reorganizing rural life into larger social units. This might be called the theory of the simplification of rural life and of the rise of a number of self-contained, mutually-exclusive larger units. There is, however, a great deal of evidence that rural life is becoming more complex, that the smaller trade centers, by a specialization of functions, are holding on in spite of difficulties and that new small centers are constantly being created. Rural life, both in good times and in depressions, is dynamic. Population is mobile. The people refuse to trade always in one place, or to go always to the same village for church or recreation. They desire change, wider contacts, variety, and it is a grave question whether it is even desirable that rural life should be so organized that every interest and concern will always draw each farmer to the same center.

### VILLAGE AND FARM CONFLICT

But whether desirable or not, the effort so to reorganize government is politically futile for

the time being. There is conflict as well as community of interests between the village and the surrounding farm population. Give them freedom of choice, as under the laws of Minnesota, and the farmers in the township will vote to separate from the village to avoid paying for village streets and poor relief. If the farmers do not do it, the villagers will, though for some other reason. If the conflict is not between village and farm, it will be between churches or language groups. Furthermore, politicians seeking to protect their own offices find easy ways of encouraging local schisms. In an area as populous as that of the hypothetical rural municipality, there may be several villages to struggle against one another.

Considered from an economic and administrative point of view, the community population of 5,000 is also open to question. Such a community could not conveniently support a complete public health unit, consisting of a physician, a sanitary inspector, and at least one nurse, all on full-time salaries. The per capita expense for this service alone would probably be from two to three dollars a year, which is well above the average. Similar objections could be made to this size of unit as an agency for road building and maintenance, for police work, for fire protection, and perhaps even for education. In fact, it is very hard to determine what administrative considerations led to the fixing of a population of 5,000 as sufficiently large "comfortably to carry on modern community enterprises."

#### POLITICAL ARGUMENTS FOR SMALL UNITS

##### THE "SCHOOL OF SELF-GOVERNMENT" ARGUMENT

A number of writers on political questions—Jefferson, de Tocqueville, Fiske, and Bryce, to mention only a few—have extolled the virtues of self-government in small communities for its supposed value as a school in self-government and public responsibility. The New England town has been especially praised for this reason. It is in small communities, we are told, that the public officers are close to the people, and that a large proportion of the men get an opportunity to hold public office. It is there that men get the best training for later service with the state and nation. This argument is also bolstered by the Biblical quotation: "Because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities."

If this argument is not tempered by other considerations, then one might deduce that the smaller the unit, the more people are getting training in the responsibilities of public officeholding, and the better the situation. Assuming this prin-

ciple to be sound, there is hardly any bottom limit until we reach that point where every voter is also an officeholder. The rural parts of North and South Dakota, and some of the cut-over counties in northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota approach this ideal by having a unit of government to about every 30 families. This approximates the ideal of complete decentralization and self-government; government is very "close to the people," whereas in large cities, where there are no town or school district meetings, and where the voters elect only one officer for every ten, twenty, or thirty thousand people, the situation is very far from this ideal.

This theory clearly puts great stress on the educational value of local self-government. In recent years it has come to be seriously questioned. The size of the unit and the ratio of voters to officeholders represent only one phase of a difficult problem. Education and experience in self-government are undoubtedly of value, but it is doubtful whether all other considerations should be subordinated to this one. Local governments exist primarily to perform certain important public services, the total expense of which runs into billions of dollars for the nation every year.

If local governments exist as a school for self-government, it is time that someone seriously considered a revision of the school organization and curriculum. What subjects are today worthy of a place in such a school? Anyone familiar with the matter would immediately say: budget-making, accounting, reporting, debt control, property assessment, financial management, personnel administration, city and regional planning, welfare and relief work, modern school administration, modern police administration, health protection, and many others. These are subjects that, if one learns them locally, will be valuable not only there but also in state and even national government. The very small local unit—the petty school district, the ordinary town or township, or the small village—is wholly incapable of teaching any of them. It is, in fact, a denial of the need of such studies, and it lacks a teacher. If the very small unit is a school at all, it tends to be one alternately in parsimony and extravagance, but always in parochialism, though there are numerous worthy exceptions.

In fine, the American school of local self-government needs a new teacher and a new curriculum. The new teacher must be the specialist, the expert, who knows the principles of responsible and democratic public administration. He can teach fairly large classes, whether he is an

expert employed in the public service, or a teacher in a university, or a worker in a governmental research bureau. With the shortening of the ballot and the increase in the size of governmental units, fewer men will reach office by the elective process, and thus gain access to the classes conducted by the expert, but many will be employed following examination, and the expert can teach them while they are in the service. These men, elected officers and appointed employees, will be learning something worth while, and through them the voters also will receive the instruction they need.

But this is possible only in large units. In other words, only relatively large units offer the opportunity for specialization that makes it possible for local government to gain the advantages of modern knowledge and methods. If, then, democracy takes care to keep open the roads from the humblest homes to all the offices and employments in government, by providing for the selection of ability wherever it appears and by equalizing educational opportunities, all who need training for government will surely get it without sacrificing any efficiency in administrative services. Given proper conditions and organization, both of which are possible, the large city with only a few elective officers may be a far better school in self-government than the petty school district, township, or village in a rural area.

#### KEEPING GOVERNMENT "CLOSE TO THE PEOPLE"

In a democracy the need to hold the government responsible to the voters is more or less axiomatic. A corollary of this proposition widely accepted in the United States in the nineteenth century was that units of government should be small so that all voters might know their officers intimately. The stress was not on competence in officials, but on having them "of the people," men just like their neighbors, and on having them under thumb. To elect men living at some distance to manage one's local affairs seemed like inviting carpetbag government, or turning one's purse over to a stranger. From this point of view the parish in England and the town or township in the United States were better than the county, and the little school district with a one-room, one-teacher school was even closer to the ideal.

It need hardly be mentioned that this attitude was incompatible with the rising demand for more extensive and more effective services, or that in cities it rapidly became an absurd ideal. For example, police service by wards or precincts was obviously futile. The small-unit idea simply ran counter to the standards of administrative

service that were rising with an improving standard of living. It was inconsistent also with the demand for state aid and other forms of central support.

The attitude still persists, however, in most rural areas. Whatever one can say against them, the rural taxpayer can point out that the township and the petty common school district are responsive to insistent demands. When the depression of the thirties became severe, and the demand for tax reduction most vociferous, the township and the rural school district were most quickly responsive to pressure. Already underpaid rural school teachers were still further reduced, township roads were neglected, and poor relief in many cases was kept below a decent minimum. Villages and the smaller cities were not far behind in their reductions of services and taxes, whereas counties, the larger cities, and the states were more resistant to the ax of economy.

To those who favor tax reduction, the argument for the small unit should be very persuasive. They should not argue that there are too many local units. To those who favor the maintenance and improvement of public services, the argument for larger and more competent units is very cogent.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

##### THE SIZE OF URBAN UNITS

If we turn from the essentially political reasons for desiring small units, to considerations of administrative effectiveness and economy, we shall find more solid ground in determining the most desirable size. It is generally agreed that every clearly defined urban community should be organized as one local government, and not split into a number of layers such as county, city, and school. The few American city-counties and the English county-boroughs represent to some extent this unification. In the United States, the idea has not been fully accepted because school administrators and other advocates of particular services have insisted upon separate school corporations and other *ad hoc* authorities, while constitutional and political difficulties have prevented complete consolidation of city and county.

The case for unification has never been better stated than by John Stuart Mill in the well-known fifteenth chapter of his *Representative Government*. A unified local government in a city will be important enough to attract able men to its service, and simple and visible enough to be watched and controlled by the voters. There need

be no dark corners in which the spoilsmen ply their trades. A balanced program of financing and public service may be worked out in such a unified government. Overhead expense can be held down to a minimum. All wastes due to overlapping and duplication can be eliminated. In fact, almost every political, administrative, and economic consideration seems to argue for a unified local government in each city.

An obvious corollary of the demand for urban unity is the necessity for having the entire urbanized area united under one government. One cannot take existing political boundaries as delimiting the city. Many large cities are almost completely hemmed in by a fringe of "satellite cities," villages, and towns, which for all economic and social purposes are part of the central city. To find the true boundaries one must go outward until the surrounding rural area is reached. Thus there needs to be horizontal as well as vertical consolidation.

One difficulty that arises is determining how much of a rural fringe should be included in the city. Every city community expects to grow and therefore feels a need of land in which to expand. If it has no such fringe of rural territory, and no control of developments therein, continued population increase will result in a mushroom growth of satellite communities in which poor housing, lax law enforcement, menacing health conditions, and fire hazards, will constitute a positive peril to the inhabitants of the city. On the other hand, if the city does not increase substantially in size, and there is no such peripheral development, but instead there continues to be much farm land in the city, there is a difficult question of differential taxation for farm property which receives no substantial city benefits.

*Determining the City's Area.* The question then arises: What area is needed for a city of any given population? We are far from having fixed standards in the comparatively new field of city planning. We can be guided toward what should be only to a limited extent by what is, partly because existing practices vary so much.

In his book on *Urban Land Uses*,<sup>6</sup> Harland Bartholomew reports intensive studies made by him in 16 cities, ranging from 5,000 to 300,000 inhabitants. In the group of self-contained (as opposed to satellite) cities, the area actually developed for residence, business, industry, and all other uses ranged from a little over 5 acres to a little over 12 acres per one hundred inhabitants,

with a mean average of about 8.16 acres. On the other hand, the undeveloped or vacant area within the city, available for expansion, ranged all the way from less than 2 to more than 21 acres per one hundred population, with an average of 6.8 acres.

Other studies show that in the matter of business property, for instance, city zoning ordinances set aside from 5 to 20 times as much land as any anticipated future population could reasonably put to use.<sup>7</sup> When the per capita purchasing power of the people and the minimum turnover required to conduct a profitable business in various classes of trade are considered, it is found that only half the frontage of business property that engineers have urged as a standard based on the analysis of existing conditions is actually profitably usable.<sup>8</sup>

Topography and the character of the community cause wide variations in area. A mill town with heavy industry and many workers' cottages will differ from a college town, or a county-seat trading center; a city on hills surrounding a bay will differ from a prairie town. Yet it seems obvious that the areas of cities have, up to the present, been largely determined by political considerations and extravagant hopes of future growth, rather than by actual present needs and careful estimates for the future.

Thus, some cities have more than twice as much vacant land scattered over their surface as developed area. Obviously, any city whose population spreads thinly over a large area will either have to deny some of its inhabitants some of the normal municipal services, or else it will have higher per capita expense for streets, public lighting, water and sewer mains, police protection, and certain other services. This higher expense may be offset in part by the possibility of greater control over the planning of the area, better living and housing conditions, more recreational area, and other advantages.

Anyone planning a new city today would, of course, make careful calculations as to the probable future population of the place. For most present-day American cities a growth of more than 50 per cent in the next generation is unlikely. On this basis, any city that has one acre undeveloped to two acres of developed land should have enough area for a long time, pro-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, *Comprehensive Report on Regional Plan of Highways, Section 2-E* (Los Angeles, 1929), p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Clarence S. Stein and Catherine K. Bauer, "Store Buildings and Neighborhood Shopping Centers," *The Architectural Forum*, February, 1934, p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Harland Bartholomew, *Urban Land Uses* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932).



vided the vacant areas have been well selected along the lines of future growth. Accepting, for lack of a better standard, the observations made by Mr. Bartholomew, about 12½ acres for every one hundred inhabitants or about one square mile for each 5,000 inhabitants, present and future, should be enough. This would mean 20 square miles for a predicted population of 100,000, and 100 square miles for a half million people. Of course, the very largest cities would not follow this rule; it is suggestive, not conclusive.

*Most Desirable Population Size.* The final difficulty in determining the optimum size of the city relates to population. So long as the social system is individualistic, and men may move and settle where they will, we shall be unable to control the population of cities. A dictator might try to determine the optimum size of an urban population, and ruthlessly move people out of the great cities into smaller places, but this has not, we believe, been seriously tried. Taking cities as they are, what is the optimum size for purposes of local government? This question has not been adequately studied, and no dogmatic answer can be given.

It appears that the per capita expenditures of government for cities of from 30,000 to 300,000 are about the same, with only a slight upward tendency with increased size, but that above the 300,000 line the increase per capita is more pronounced. Tax rates per thousand dollars of valuation do not show the same upward tendency, however, since per capita valuations of taxable property tend to be higher in the larger cities. In fact, in more normal times, money wages and incomes per capita tend also to be higher in large than in small places, with the result that higher per capita expenses can probably be borne without great difficulty. It must also be remembered that the larger cities generally render more municipal services than smaller places.

All things considered, it is hard from any point of view to set an optimum population for good and economical city government. The decision as between large and small city must be made on other grounds, such as income, living costs, and other conditions. It appears clear, however, that the larger scale of production of municipal services in the largest places does not lead to unit costs lower than those experienced by cities of moderate size.

At the other end of the scale there is always the question of how large a community should be before it is permitted to incorporate separately as a municipality. In Minnesota only one hundred

inhabitants on platted land are needed to incorporate a village, and half this number will suffice if the community is located on a state boundary. The incorporation of such petty hamlets shows the principle of local self-determination carried to its logical conclusion, absurd though it may seem. Obviously, such small places are incapable of supporting any but the most rudimentary and limited of public services, but frequently there is no other way under the laws for small communities to get united effort and support in providing a water supply or some other common service.

#### THE SIZE OF RURAL UNITS

If we turn now from the problems of cities to consider again the appropriate areas of rural administration, we shall do well to keep economic and administrative factors in the foreground. The attempts to find the ideal size of rural community from either the sociological or the purely political point of view have already been considered. The modern view, that local units exist primarily for the efficient and economical provision of certain essential public services, probably offers the best point from which the problem of optimum size can be attacked.

The essential services to be considered are, first, schools and roads, since these are almost everywhere the most expensive. Of great financial importance also are welfare and poor relief, whereas public health, courts and law enforcement, taxation and financial administration, and certain other functions usually performed by counties normally cost considerably less.

Aside from any traditional attachment of the people to existing county and township boundaries, and the strength of vested political interests in maintaining them, the rural areas would seem to offer the best possible place for carving out ideal administrative areas. The city or village is distinct and separable from the surrounding countryside, and whatever its population, whether 500 or 500,000, it probably must continue as it is for administrative purposes. For better or for worse, however, it is in rural districts that the most difficult area problems arise.

*Rural Educational Units.* Let us consider education. Everyone who studies the matter realizes that the little country school district, supporting a one-room school, is administratively inadequate to the task of modern schooling. Thousands of such districts have fewer than 10 pupils enrolled in each school. The expense of teaching is high, no matter how poorly the teacher is paid, and the quality of work done is usually poor because

of lack of competition among pupils, lack of equipment, lack of proper grading of the children, and lack of a properly trained teacher. Much the same sort of criticism can justly be directed against hundreds of little country high schools or "high school departments" in which from one to four teachers struggle against odds to give proper instruction to a handful of students over the whole range of the high school curriculum. Despite these defects, the process of change to larger units is a slow and painful one.

Competent educational authorities now believe that each state should be so districted that in each district complete schooling can be provided from kindergarten through the senior high school. If we stop here, without adding a junior college to the school setup, the district should be large enough to support one adequate high school. How large a school is that? Dr. J. H. Kolb, of the University of Wisconsin, has made separate calculations on the basis of 100 and 250 high school pupils and has concluded that the larger unit is preferable to the smaller one for economic as well as for other reasons.

Applied, for example, to Minnesota, this would mean a typical rural school district of about 6,250 people, and an area of about 400 square miles, or 11 townships. In this calculation, all municipalities of 2,500 or over are assumed to be separate school districts. Such a change would eliminate nearly 7,000 school districts in Minnesota. Each new district of minimum size would have about 1,050 grade and elementary school pupils and about 250 or more high school pupils. The former could be educated in a number of one- and two-room and graded schools scattered throughout the area, without much transportation expense, whereas, with transportation and some boarding, the high school pupils could be brought to one central school.

*Carrying the Overhead.* From one point of view, even districts of these proportions would be fairly small. The superintendent's salary alone would come to about three dollars per pupil per year, and it would be expensive to have a staff of supervisors in addition. It should be noted, however, that one county in Minnesota has a county school unit for just about the population here estimated, and that it appears to be doing much better work than the former numerous separate school districts did, and at a lower total and per-student expense. Most of the counties in the state could have from two to five of the minimum units described above. The question then naturally arises: Why should not the whole county

be the school unit? The per-pupil expense of superintendence and supervision could in that way be further reduced, and perhaps there would be other economies. How much better the teaching would be is a matter of conjecture.

Under either of these plans one of the largest savings comes from the discontinuance of a number of one-room schools with small enrollments, and the regrouping of the children in the better one- and two-room and larger schools. The added expense of transportation is found to be only a fraction of the saving in teachers' salaries and building maintenance. Furthermore, the pupils can get better teachers, and the teachers can be better supervised by a trained and responsible superintendent.

*The Rural Highway Unit.* If the county is the school unit, there can be close cooperation between the superintendent and the county highway department in the planning of road construction and maintenance to serve the schools. This is a matter of fundamental importance, but it is not to be assumed that a county highway engineer could not cooperate with two or more separate school districts in his county.

On the other hand, the evidence in Minnesota at least points strongly to the fact that many of the counties are so small for highway purposes that their overhead in this department is unduly high. Larger counties seem to be, on the whole, better for highway purposes. This would probably be true even if the counties took over all the town roads. Thus we find that the best minimum county size for one purpose is not necessarily the best for other purposes. In fact, no two functions seem to follow exactly the same lines in this respect. Road mileages, the available budget for construction and maintenance, and similar factors determine adequacy in size for a road unit, whereas numbers of pupils and factors related thereto are controlling as to the efficient size of the school unit.

#### TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

We have, then, several questions to answer. *First*, is it desirable in rural as in urban areas to have only a single important administrative unit in each defined area? This certainly seems to be the case. In the same county area there may be one board for general county business, and another for administering school affairs, but that the areas should coincide and that budgets and debt questions should somehow be settled in common for the area can hardly be disputed. It is assumed, of course, that cities and villages within the county



will have their own separate governments for local urban purposes.

*Second*, assuming the county to be the main administrative unit in rural areas, what factors should determine its size? Topography, distance, and population density cannot be wholly ignored, but so far as possible the administrative efficiency and economy of the more expensive functions should control. These functions are roads, schools, and welfare work, as a rule.

*Third*, when one of these services (roads) calls for a really large unit, and the other (schools) could be handled by either a somewhat smaller unit or equally well if not better by the same large unit, which size unit should be selected—the larger or the smaller? The answer is obvious. The larger is to be preferred, since it involves no financial or other loss, whereas the choice of the smaller size of unit would involve loss. It must always be remembered, also, that the larger units generally attract abler men both to their boards and to positions under them, and that the tax burden is more widely and evenly distributed when units are large.

*Fourth*, will there not be some loss due to increased expense in other departments? Our studies in Minnesota suggest the opposite. When counties are ranged according to population, we find that the ordinary county expenses per capita, including overhead, decrease very noticeably as we advance from the least populous to the more populous counties. After we reach about 30,000 or 35,000 population, the per capita general expense declines less rapidly, but there is no evidence as in cities that the per capita costs go up again as population increases further. Hence we have concluded that under Minnesota conditions the minimum desirable population of the county is about 30,000, and that counties which fall below that level are bound to pay a little more per capita for equal service or else are compelled to accept less or poorer service. We do not assert that the same rule would hold in other states.

Of necessity this brief discussion leaves many questions unanswered. It does not consider the relationship of the village to the county, nor the effect of area and distance to the county seat in increasing the expense and inconvenience to the individual when counties are enlarged. Our bias in favor of putting economic and administrative considerations somewhat ahead of social and political, without excluding the latter, was not sufficiently discussed. Neither have we gone fully into the value of the concept of an "optimum size" for local units.

As to the latter point it is clear that until the figures in each state reveal what units are falling below and what ones are attaining or surpassing a given standard, we shall have nothing concrete to suggest to our legislatures respecting local reorganization. Behind any such concept of a norm, or an optimum size, lies a great deal of political philosophy which is here only casually suggested.

If the conclusions tentatively reached in the preceding discussion be now applied, what would be the units of local government in the United States? About how many would there be?

The approach, be it remembered, is mainly from the viewpoints of administrative efficiency and fiscal economy. Other considerations have been given weight but not controlling force. Furthermore, since exhaustive research has not yet been carried out in any part of the field, the following conclusions are themselves tentative and are necessarily somewhat biased in the direction of fewer and larger units of local government. Thus qualified, the conclusions are as follows:

*First*, there would be no separate school districts in the country whatsoever. Under state control and supervision the several counties, cities, larger towns, and larger villages would administer the local schools within their limits. Advisory and even administrative school boards might exist in many places, but not separate corporate school districts.

It is recognized that this is an advanced proposal, but it follows from the principle of having only one local government in each area. The existing separation between school government and other local government, however much it may have been justified in the past, now stands in the way of an adequate local governmental organization. To separate the function of education from other functions of government, to give school authorities and teachers a feeling of irresponsibility for the rest of the government, to permit school budgets to be made, school taxes to be levied, and school bonds to be issued without reference to other governmental needs is in the long run unwholesome for the educational system itself and for the political institutions of the country. Education will always be one of the important functions of government, but it will not fare the worse and probably will greatly benefit from being more closely articulated with all the other activities of state and local government.

*Second*, practically all other special districts would also disappear through the application of our principle. In metropolitan districts some ex-

ceptions might be made in order to create larger units for certain purposes than seem to be needed for others, and federations of counties or other units in certain regions might be justified for such functions as the maintenance of expensive sanatoriums. Special districts smaller than existing counties and cities, for the maintenance of parks, roads, and other works, utilities, or services, are not really needed and are in many respects undesirable except where a function extends across existing boundaries. A drainage system involving parts of several counties would be a case coming within the exception, but an *ad hoc* federation of the counties and municipalities concerned would be a more logical solution and would not necessitate the creation of an additional unit.

The reasons for creating special districts at present are numerous and varied. Sometimes there is a desire to evade constitutional debt and tax limits which prevent other units from providing a service. In most cases the purpose seems to be mainly that of providing for localized support (and control) of a local improvement. As to localizing support, almost exactly the same result can be obtained by having the county or city concerned establish an assessment district, which is primarily a geographical expression and which ceases to be important as soon as the improvement has been paid for. As far as localized control is concerned, it is generally unskilled and uneconomical, and it may be undesirable in other ways.

*Third*, townships in most of the Middle West and several Middle Atlantic states would cease to exist as important governing units, but might continue as areas to the extent needed for the local administrative and election purposes of the county, and as centers of public discussion with power to support a community building and minor local amenities. It would not be necessary by law to abolish townships. Legislation transferring their main functions to the county would in most cases be sufficient to cause them to atrophy and ultimately to disappear where they do not perform important services.

*Fourth*, the towns of the New England states are in general in a different position from that of the township. Many of them are urban and industrial, and are more like the cities and villages than are the townships of the Middle West. Until the counties assume greater importance in the local government of the New England states, the towns, both rural and urban, have useful functions to perform. In the meantime, a great deal of consolidation among the least populous and more rural towns would seem to be indicated by the

tentative principles concerning the desirable sizes of local units. Ultimately the county might take over most of the local functions of state-wide importance.

*Fifth*, for the more local and urban purposes, cities, villages, boroughs, incorporated towns, and many of the towns of New England would remain as they now are, although many of the smallest villages have little reason for separate corporate existence.

*Sixth*, in the main urban centers there would be the city-county type of unit, like the county-borough in England, handling all the functions of a city, a county, and a school district.

*Seventh*, in rural areas, and in areas partly urban and partly rural, the county would be the main unit for performing services of state-wide importance, including education, and also for providing the rural local services. It might also take over water supply, street maintenance, and street lighting for the smaller villages. The number of counties would, however, be reduced, since many counties today are too small and too poor to provide effectively for the services expected of them, and the prospects as to further population increase are generally very discouraging.

These eliminations and consolidations would result in the following numerical arrangement of local units:

A RATIONALIZED SCHEME OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS  
FOR THE UNITED STATES

Units	Approximate Number
City-Counties (each having a central city of at least 50,000 population) .....	200
Counties (rural and part-rural) .....	2,100
Incorporated Places (including the larger towns in New England) .....	15,000
Miscellaneous Units .....	500
TOTAL .....	17,800

The total here is approximately one-ninth of the number of units now in existence. The average state, instead of having nearly 3,500 local units, would have about 370. That such a number of local units could handle the affairs of local government is beyond question.

The relative importance of the different proposed units would be about as follows. The 200 city-counties would include about 42 per cent of the total population and more than 45 per cent of the total wealth. The other 2,100 counties (including the incorporated places within their limits) would include the remaining 58 per cent of the population, subdivided as follows: the incorporated places other than city-counties would

embrace about 23 per cent of the population, and this part of the people would be under two layers of local government, i.e., a county, and an incorporated place. The other 35 per cent of the people in the ordinary counties would be in strictly rural territory, and would have but one local government, the county.

It will be noted that there would be normally only a single level or layer of local government for over three-fourths of the people. Less than one-fourth would have normally a two-layer system. Some special units (metropolitan districts, port districts, etc.) would add another layer in a few places.

To achieve the total reductions indicated in a complete reorganization of local units, a few states would have to make very little if any change. The principal changes would have to come in the states from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, west to Montana, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri. New England,

the South, and the far West would have much less pruning and reorganizing of local units to do.

The difficulties involved in bringing about such sweeping changes in local government as are here suggested should not be forgotten. Forty-eight different states must act. Forty-eight constitutions must be amended. Forty-eight legislatures must be induced to legislate. It is not the purpose of this chapter to advocate such action, or to suggest ways and means. Its main purpose is to suggest a goal—a goal that will not appeal to all as worthy, and one that may never be reached. It is a goal dictated by the need for greater efficiency and genuine economy in a system of local government that must meet the needs of life in the twentieth century, instead of clinging blindly to the forms of a bygone age. A strong and efficient system of local government is a necessity for the progressive development of real democracy and the maintenance of economical and effective public services.

## APPENDIX TO THE 1945 EDITION

### THE 1942 CENSUS BUREAU ENUMERATION OF GOVERNMENTAL UNITS

IN THE first edition of this bulletin (1934) attention was called to certain differences between its enumeration of units of government and that of the Census Bureau. When the second edition was published (1942) the Bureau was engaged in taking its decennial *Census of Governments*, regularly taken in the years ending in "2" and formerly called *Wealth, Debt, and Taxation*. Having completed all that he ever expected to do on this enumeration of units, in November, 1942, the author of this bulletin turned over to the Census Bureau his data sheets and records, in the hope that the Bureau would continue the work.

Now in 1944 comes a new enumeration of governmental units by the Bureau of the Census.<sup>1</sup> It was prepared under the supervision of Dr. E. R. Gray, Chief of the Governments Division of the Bureau, but special credit is given to Dr. Richard C. Spencer who bore the principal responsibility for dealing with the technical problems involved.

The readers of this PAS Publication will be interested in the major differences between the figures here presented and those set forth in the

Census publication. To facilitate comparison Table 1 of the Census publication is reproduced herewith (p. 49). The data that it contains may be compared with those in Table 3, p. 17, above.

What are the principal differences in the two enumerations?

1. The over-all total reached by the Census Bureau is 155,116, compared to the Anderson total of 165,049, a difference of 9,933.

2. By classes of units the differences are as follows:

	Anderson Enumeration	Census Bureau Enumeration	Difference
Counties .....	3,050	3,050	None
Towns and Townships	18,998	18,919	79
Incorporated Places...	16,262	16,220	42
School Districts.....	118,308	108,579	9,729
Other Special Districts.	8,382	8,299	83

It will be noticed that in all categories except counties, where there is no difference, the Census figures are under the Anderson totals. The biggest change, and almost the entire difference, is to be found in the category of school districts.

How can these differences be explained?

1. The Census figures are later in date by one year, and it is evident that there is a continuation of the downward trend in local units that

<sup>1</sup> *Governmental Units in the United States 1942*. pp. iv, 67. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1944.

## THE UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

TABLE 1.—SUMMARY OF GOVERNMENTAL UNITS, BY STATE: 1942 \*  
(1942 ENUMERATION OF THE CENSUS BUREAU)

REGION AND STATE	All governmental units <sup>1</sup>	Counties	Townships and towns	NUMBER				
				Total	Municipalities Urban <sup>2</sup>	Rural	School districts	Special districts
U. S. TOTAL	155,116	3,050	18,919	16,220	3,332	12,888	108,579	8,299
Northeast	17,085	205	4,184	2,144	834	1,310	9,369	1,174
North Central	96,595	1,051	14,667	7,721	1,099	6,622	70,297	2,847
South	25,130	1,386	.....	4,756	999	3,757	17,061	1,911
West	16,305	408	68	1,599	400	1,199	11,852	2,367
Alabama	511	67	.....	275	60	215	110	58
Arizona	499	14	.....	33	16	17	397	54
Arkansas	3,705	75	.....	374	53	321	2,644	611
California	4,149	<sup>a</sup> 57	.....	286	167	119	2,809	996
Colorado	2,358	<sup>a</sup> 62	.....	239	30	209	1,937	119
Connecticut	349	8	154	37	27	10	14	135
Delaware	70	3	.....	51	8	43	14	1
Dist. of Col.	2	.....	.....	1	1	.....	.....	1
Florida	503	67	.....	267	70	197	67	101
Georgia	946	159	.....	470	77	393	222	94
Idaho	1,666	44	.....	152	26	126	1,148	321
Illinois	15,854	102	1,434	1,137	208	929	12,138	1,042
Indiana	3,043	92	1,010	529	98	431	1,182	229
Iowa	7,519	99	1,608	932	89	843	4,861	18
Kansas	11,115	105	1,524	589	64	525	8,632	264
Kentucky	771	120	.....	285	56	229	261	104
Louisiana	523	<sup>a</sup> 63	.....	194	54	140	67	198
Maine	584	16	482	51	26	25	.....	34
Maryland	207	23	.....	142	22	120	.....	41
Massachusetts	409	<sup>a</sup> 13	312	39	39	.....	.....	44
Michigan	8,106	83	1,265	479	126	353	6,270	8
Minnesota	10,398	87	1,884	752	78	674	7,673	1
Mississippi	1,792	82	.....	270	48	222	1,189	250
Missouri	10,740	114	329	734	87	647	8,613	949
Montana	2,175	56	.....	115	23	92	1,932	71
Nebraska	8,307	93	476	530	36	494	7,009	198
Nevada	163	17	.....	12	5	7	115	18
New Hampshire	546	10	223	11	11	.....	231	70
New Jersey	1,143	21	235	331	164	167	490	65
New Mexico	225	31	.....	64	22	42	105	24
New York	8,339	<sup>a</sup> 57	932	610	202	408	6,064	675
North Carolina	603	100	.....	431	76	355	.....	71
North Dakota	4,066	53	1,399	333	12	321	2,272	8
Ohio	4,021	88	1,339	890	186	704	1,655	48
Oklahoma	5,100	77	.....	499	74	425	4,518	5
Oregon	2,332	36	.....	193	34	159	1,844	258
Pennsylvania	5,263	<sup>a</sup> 66	1,575	984	345	639	2,546	91
Rhode Island	54	( <sup>c</sup> )	32	7	7	.....	.....	14
South Carolina	2,057	46	.....	241	51	190	1,744	25
South Dakota	4,919	<sup>a</sup> 64	1,128	301	19	282	3,423	2
Tennessee	328	95	.....	206	57	149	11	15
Texas	7,360	254	.....	637	196	441	6,159	309
Utah	303	29	.....	201	25	176	40	32
Vermont	398	14	239	74	13	61	24	46
Virginia	323	100	.....	208	53	155	.....	14
Washington	1,906	39	68	221	40	181	1,148	429
West Virginia	326	55	.....	205	45	160	55	10
Wisconsin	8,508	71	1,271	515	94	421	6,569	81
Wyoming	531	23	.....	83	12	71	377	47

\* *Governmental Units in the United States 1942*, p. 9 U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1944.<sup>1</sup> Includes the federal government and the 48 state governments.<sup>2</sup> Incorporated places having more than 2,500 inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> The City and County of San Francisco in California and the City and County of Denver in Colorado are counted as cities and not as counties.<sup>4</sup> The following counties are counted only as cities because they are wholly or very largely consolidated with the cities indicated: Orleans Parish with New Orleans City; Suffolk County with Boston City; Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, and Richmond counties, with New York City; Philadelphia County with Philadelphia City.<sup>5</sup> Counties not organized as local governments.<sup>6</sup> The county areas of Armstrong, Shannon, Todd, Washabaugh, and Washington are unorganized as counties and are attached for administrative purposes to neighboring counties.

was noted in the 1942 edition of this PAS Publication.

2. The number of counties has become substantially stabilized, but there are small reductions in the numbers of towns and townships, incorporated places, and special districts for other than school purposes. These reductions in numbers probably represent, at least in part, actual decreases in the number of units within the year; but it must be noted also that the Bureau of the Census has field representatives who were able to make a more careful check of the local data. The author of the PAS Publication had to rely almost entirely on the data supplied to him by local officials and unofficial collaborators.

3. The latter factor—the careful check by local agents of the Census Bureau—probably accounts in part, also, for some of the differences in the numbers of school districts reported from certain states. In addition to this the movement for the elimination of petty rural school districts through consolidations and otherwise continues to move forward. New York has been something of a leader in this effort for a number of years.

On the other hand the largest differences between the Anderson 1941 and the Census 1942 figures in the numbers of school districts (and they are very large differences) seem to result from a more strict and accurate application by the Census Bureau of the definition of a unit of local government. In short the Bureau found that many entities in certain states that were counted by Anderson as school districts were not units of government at all. In the judgment of the Bureau's experts these entities lacked some one of the essential characteristics, such as a power to collect a local revenue. Consequently the Bureau just eliminated them from the list.

This was particularly true in certain southern states—Mississippi (3915 units), Georgia (1028), Florida (837), North Carolina (176), and Tennessee (149). The reductions from the Anderson figures in these five states range from over 75 to 100 per cent, and account for about two-thirds of the total reduction. At the same time the Bureau reported substantially fewer school district units of government also in Wisconsin (825, or 11 per cent), Texas (420, or 6 per cent), New York (369, or 6 per cent), Arkansas (276, or 10 per cent), Washington (263, or 19 per cent), Vermont (249, or 90 per cent), and so on down to smaller differences.

In short, then, it is in the school district category that the biggest differences between the two enumerations are to be found, and these differences are to be explained in the main by the fact that the Bureau decided that certain entities enumerated by Anderson are not fully entitled to be classified as units of government.

The author of this note, who is also the author of the Anderson-PAS Publication, has no reason to quarrel with the Bureau's findings. On the contrary, he has good reason to believe that the Bureau's figures represent a more accurate enumeration than any that he was ever able to make. He is happy to have had a useful part in the effort to enumerate the units of local government in the United States, and he hopes that the Bureau of the Census will keep up its work in this field so that future enumerations will be even more accurate than any present one can be expected to be.

WILLIAM ANDERSON

University of Minnesota  
December, 1944.

## APPENDIX TO THE 1949 EDITION

ALTHOUGH the Decennial Population Census of 1950 is not likely to include a new enumeration of units of government, it is expected that the 1952 Census of Governments will do so. In the meantime the Anderson enumeration of 1941 (published in 1942) and the Census Bureau enumeration of 1942 (published in 1944) will suffice for ordinary purposes, although both are somewhat out of date. Lacking the time and the facilities for a complete re-enumeration at this time, the author has written to public officials in all the states for information

on changes in local governmental units during the 1940's. The results of this survey have not been thoroughly checked, and the figures are not sufficiently complete or comparable to justify reducing them to tabular form. They do reveal certain trends, however, and these trends are likely to be reflected in the 1952 enumeration.

The number of *counties* will show practically no change. On the other hand the number of organized *townships* will show some reduction, particularly in such midwestern states as Minnesota and Missouri.

Among *incorporated places* (cities, villages, boroughs, incorporated towns) the trends are somewhat mixed. A few states will show a decrease in numbers of such places, partly because of the elimination from the count of small places that have become inactive or dissolved. In general, however, the trend is upwards. The war-time shifts of population to new industrial areas and the recently increased movement of population from the larger cities into the suburbs have been accompanied or followed by many new incorporations. Communities are incorporating to provide their own urban services, to avoid annexation to other cities, and for other reasons. All told the increases in incorporated places may amount to several hundred by 1952, but in terms of percentages this will not be more than a very few per cent over the more than 16,000 municipalities that were reported in the early 1940's.

It is among *school districts* that we find the most significant trend of all, and that trend is definitely and decisively downward. In a number of states there have been systematic and long-continued efforts, which are continuing even now in some states, to reduce the number of separate school administrative units. Illinois, for example, which in the early 1940's had over 12,000 separate school districts, has reduced the number to less than 6,000 (5,735 reported in August, 1949). Kansas, which previously stood next to Illinois in number of school districts, with 8,632 in 1942, had eliminated over 3,100 units by mid-1949, to bring the total number remaining to 5,500. New York, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and other states have also made substantial reductions. It is expected, therefore, that the next official nationwide enumeration will find the number of school districts to be well under 100,000 for the first time in a number of decades.

This expectation is supported by the following figures from education officials in twelve states that have made substantial reductions in the number of school districts during the 1940's.

	1942 Census Figure	Officially Reported 1948 or 1949 Total	Decrease
California ....	2,809	2,342	467
Idaho .....	1,148	505	643
Illinois .....	12,138	5,735	6,403
Kansas .....	8,632	5,500	3,132
Missouri .....	8,613	8,326	287
Montana .....	1,932	1,500	432
Oklahoma ....	4,518	2,400	2,118
Oregon .....	1,844	1,363	481
New York ...	6,064	4,568	1,496
Ohio .....	1,655	1,520	135
Texas .....	6,159	4,412	1,747
Wisconsin ....	6,569	6,038	531

It may be noted that the number of school districts in existence and the number in operation at any time are not necessarily the same. In Minnesota, for example, many small school districts do not operate their own schools. Instead, they levy the annual tax to the amount needed, along with state aid, to pay tuition and transportation costs, and send their children afoot or by bus to neighboring school districts for their education. Any such district may, of course, reopen its school at any time, but many are likely never to do so.

In the field of *special districts* other than those for schools, the trend is not all one way. In any year a number will be discontinued and others established. A recent increase in the number of local "authorities" for public housing and other purposes raises again the question whether they are special units of local government, in the nature of special districts, or whether they are merely agencies of existing general-purpose local units, like most park and library boards. Pennsylvania, for example, enacted in 1945 a "Municipality Authorities Act" (Public Law 382), of broad scope, to authorize municipalities, counties, and even townships to create such authorities for a wide range of purposes. Each such authority is declared to be a "body corporate and politic," but other provisions of the act make the authority somewhat dependent upon the local unit that creates it.

To summarize the foregoing brief comments, the net result of all the changes that are going on in the creation and dissolution of local governmental units is likely to be a continuance of the downward trend in total numbers that began several decades ago. Incorporated places alone show a definite tendency to increase in numbers, but the increases are numerically not large, while the reductions, recent and current, in school districts are so pronounced that they greatly outnumber the increases in other categories. Were it not for the confusion caused by the creation of new types of special districts and municipal authorities from time to time, one could say that the trend is toward a settling down and a stabilization of the local government system, with counties already practically stabilized at a little over 3,000, and other general-purpose authorities such as cities, villages, and boroughs (incorporated places) slowly on the increase, but tending also to reach a plateau in numbers.

WILLIAM ANDERSON

August, 1949

